

**BEING A METIS WOMAN:
OUR LIVED STORIES**

A Thesis

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in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Education
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by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of my study was to describe the lived stories of four Metis women in the form of collective narratives. And, as a Metis woman, I have reflected on the collective narratives as a way of interpreting and making meaning out of our lived stories in order to gain knowledge.

The literature which I reviewed as I came to understand the parameters of my study included the stories of Metis women which have been published in literary forms. As well, I reviewed literature pertaining to stories as an expression of human existence, the study of meaning in stories, and stories, meaning and knowledge.

The research was conducted using a qualitative research design. The participants and I engaged in conversations, and the stories which emerged formed the content of my data. After I was given approval from my participants to use their lived stories, I created the collective narratives as an expression of how I understand our stories. The stories were presented as three collective narratives: identity, family and soul murder. Then, I reflected on each of the collective narratives as an example of how I make meaning and gain knowledge.

The findings from my study suggest that the stories emerged in a collective manner and that I, as a Metis woman, view our stories collectively

and not as singular entities. As well, my reflections present a written account of how I make meaning from the collective narratives as a way to gain knowledge. As a cultural insider, I may be presenting a perspective in understanding our lived stories which has not been articulated in the past. The main contribution which this study may provide is an opportunity to begin to understand the loss and the absence of voice of some Metis women.

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DEDICATION

My thesis is dedicated to my children

Nathan

Lysanne

Lucien

There are no words to express how
I feel towards you. You are, and
have been, the central part of my
life, my story. I thank the Creator
for giving you to me as children.

You are not mine to keep -- you
are only mine to create stories with --
and to love.

Mom

My thesis is also dedicated to Elton McKay. The special relationship which we share was meant to be a part of my life story. Thank you for being who you are. I love you.

As well, my thesis is dedicated to

My father Warren
My mother Jeannette and step-father Don
My sister Theresa, Rene, Desiree, Justin and David
My brother Marc
My sister Michelle, Tristan and Teghan

My extended families
Agnes and Wilfred
Blanche, Danny, Courtney and Zoey
The McKay family

Those who went before me
Those who will follow me

The Creator.

Louise

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CHAPTER ONE

BEGINNINGS ARE JUST A POINT IN TIME

The Beginning

I AM SORRY THAT I COULDN'T PROTECT YOU

It has been very easy for me
to come here,
yet it has been the most difficult

I have been led
to face
some more of the truth

I heard you tell me
of the death of kohkom
and
as I sat next to you
I actually looked down
at me
and if I were to touch
my own cheek
I would not have been there

Some things in this life
are not meant to be understood
so, I am told

I cannot understand this

I will speak to you now
I felt you
Those many years ago
tapwě-ěsa nipakwătěn
to not have known you

I do not understand why
 nobody helped me
 nobody talked to me
 nobody cared to
 nobody gave me a choice

and yet, I do understand
 the man, the man, and the man
 they painted the picture
 I provided the colour
 I fit the scheme
 I completed the idea

and so, the song was sung.

kāsīnamawin
 as I struggle to forgive myself
 tapwē-ēsa nipakwātēn I couldn't
 protect you

or me.

I am a woman of mixed-blood First Nations ancestry. I am also a mother, a partner, an educator and a counsellor. As well, I am a graduate student involved in the process of learning to acquire research skills by engaging in a master's degree program. In considering a topic to research for my master's thesis, I have been drawn to a concept which has intrigued me throughout my life and through my many roles in life. As I grow through experiencing my various roles, I have come to understand how my life creates a series of opportunities for me to learn (Elder Musqua, personal communication, 1994). My journey of learning has been based on my life experiences and my ability to interpret and process events. Ridington (1990)

expresses the idea that learning is a journey in his writing about the Dunne-za people by describing knowledge as something that has been experienced and interpreted. He states that

...a person who speaks from the authority of his or her experience "little bit know something". Knowledge, the elders say, empowers a person to live in this world with intelligence and understanding...From...experiences, children have grown into adults who "little bit know something". ...Knowledge is highly contextualised within experience rather than instrumental to purposes removed from experience. (p. xv)

Through the use of story I express a "little bit know something". Stories provide me with the opportunity to describe and reflect on, or interpret, my life experiences. "[By using] stories and voice of [me as a] student [I] strive to construct new meaning out of [my] life experience" (Brody, Witherell, Donald, & Lundblad, 1991, p. 265). As well, Alasdair MacIntyre, a moral philosopher states that "we all live out narratives in our lives... and we understand our own lives in terms of the narratives we live out... Stories are lived before they are told -- except in the case of fiction" (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 197).

Based on these ideas of intrigue and inquiry, my thesis describes the stories of four Metis women in the form of collective narratives. The collective narratives are the most accurate way in which I can present my view of the stories of the four Metis women participants in this study. The stories, presented in the form of the collective narratives, are the expression of how I understand them as they blend together rather than being viewed as individual or solitary expressions of life experiences. And, as a Metis woman, I reflect on

the collective narratives as an example of how I interpret and make meaning out of the stories in order to gain knowledge.

Within the context of sharing stories I describe and reflect on my experiences, and I hear the description of and reflection on the experiences of others. The act of sharing my life experiences involves an ongoing process of living the experience and expressing it in the form of a story. "A person ... reveals what he or she knows through the ongoing story of his or her life" (Ridington, 1990, p. xv). Stories also give me the opportunity to reflect on my experiences, and I use "narrative [as] the primary form through which [I] construct the dimension of my life's meaningfulness and understand it as significant" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 155). As a Metis woman, I am constantly being invited into the realm of story as a way to connect and to reflect with others so that we can develop this sense of meaningfulness and significance together. There are "therapeutic aspects of storytelling, drawing connections between the ways...narratives are employed by traditional healers...and the ways narratives are elicited, reinterpreted, and retold" (Narayan, 1991, p. 114). Through stories, I hear descriptions of and reflections on the experiences of others as they relate the meanings that experiences provide in their lives. "The importance of listening to and learning from day-to-day events" (Ridington, 1990, p. 225) as a sharing of life experience cannot be underestimated. Stories are shared from me and with me every day.

My interest in the description of, and reflection on, stories is not a new

phenomenon. Stories have existed among all people for time immemorial. The importance of description and reflection using stories as content in my study articulates one mode of thought or way of knowing. Jerome Bruner, in Actual Minds, Possible Worlds explains:

There are two modes of cognitive functioning, two modes of thought, each providing distinctive ways of ordering experience, of constructing reality. The two (though complementary) are irreducible to one another. Efforts to reduce one mode to the other or to ignore one at the expense of the other inevitably fail to capture the rich diversity of thought.

Each of the ways of knowing, moreover, has operating principles of its own and its own criteria of well-formedness. They differ radically in their procedures for verification. A good story and a well-formed argument are different natural kinds. Both can be used as means for convincing another. Yet what they convince of is fundamentally different: arguments convince one of their truth, stories of their lifelikeness. (p. 11)

Richardson supports Bruner by stating that the logico-scientific mode of knowing reflects empirical reasoning which aims at statements of universal truth. Alternatively, the narrative mode searches for reason by describing understandings which are deeply embedded and contextualised in life experiences. Stories provide us with the opportunity to express the description and reflection of these life experiences. In providing the alternative to logico-scientific reasoning, then, "narrative cannot be suppressed within the human sciences because it is ineluctably tied to human experience, trying to suppress it undermines the very foundation of the human sciences" (Richardson, 1990, p. 21).

Understanding How I Came to this Beginning

To have some sense of clarity about the thesis that I want to write has taken me quite some time. It has been important for me to write about something that is relevant and not to see the thesis writing as simply an exercise of completing certain tasks in order to receive a master's degree. Meaning has been crucial to me in this task. So, it is very important to me that my head is not separate from my heart or from my intuitive sense of being that really leads me to my thesis statement because there is a "tendency for Cree individuals to emphasize meaning more than form, to view events personally rather than only objectively" (Ridington, 1990, p. 107). For these reasons, I have chosen to conduct a research project which will describe, in the form of collective narratives, and reflect on the themes which emerge from the stories of four Metis women. In the process of our conversations, we tell our stories and we laugh, cry, explain, describe, feel, think and, most importantly, we come to understand our life experiences more than we did before our time spent together. The sharing of stories in conversations occurs every day, and I am interested in describing and reflecting on the themes which emerge from the sharing of our life experiences.

It has taken me four years to decide on my thesis topic. Only recently have I become comfortable with the idea of describing and reflecting on the themes which emerge from the stories of four Metis women. To some people, I may have taken a very round about path in order to come to this central idea,

but like other experiences in my life, I have learned something about myself in the process. It has been an intuitive and unconscious practise of mine not to proceed with something until I feel that it is the right time. The reasons for this practise are based on two ideas. The first idea involves the issue of making a commitment to do something where other people are involved. It is important that I can fulfil the commitments that I make to others, and so I consider this commitment before I proceed. Second, I need to feel that I am capable of accomplishing the task. This commitment to myself is also an important consideration. This process, which takes a considerable amount of time, is not based on procrastination or not wanting to proceed, rather it is important for me to feel as if the ideas which guide my behaviour are taken care of. I have to sense and receive the feeling that it is the right time to proceed.

This same kind of response [by First Nations people] seems to operate in virtually all situations which are felt to be foreign, unfamiliar, or threatening...There will be little talking, few decisions, and virtually no commitments to particular courses of action until all the new variables have been carefully examined. (Ross, 1992, p. 37)

I now feel that I can describe and reflect on the stories of four Metis women as an example of how I make meaning and gain knowledge.

Why this Beginning was Important and Significant

This study describes the stories of four Metis women by themes in the form of collective narratives. This study also describes how I, as a Metis woman, reflect on these stories as an example of how I interpret and make

meaning out of the stories in order to gain knowledge. These descriptions become statements of how we, as four Metis women experience life, express this experience in the form of story, and how I gain knowledge by interpreting and reflecting on the stories. With this purpose in mind, I present this study as an account of descriptive narrative research. Polkinghorne makes a claim that the purpose of a study can distinguish the type of narrative stance used in the research. He states:

descriptive narrative research produces an accurate description of the interpretive narrative accounts individuals or groups use to make sequences of events in their lives or organizations meaningful. This research produces a document describing the narratives held in or below awareness that make up the interpretive schemes a people or community uses to establish the significance of past events and to anticipate the consequences of possible future actions. The research does not construct a new narrative; it merely reports already existing ones. (pp. 161-162)

Therefore, my study is a report of the stories we share as Metis women.

The stories from the four Metis women participants were taped during conversations, and they were transcribed and presented in written form as collective narratives. By presenting the women's stories in the form of themes as collective narratives, the events become a coherent and unified experience rather than each individual's separate experience. The collective narratives represent how I understand the stories in relationship to each other and in relationship to the themes which emerged. The collective narratives also represent the concept of stories within an ongoing story where beginnings are just a point in time, and as life events unfold, the description and reflection on

those stories become a way in which I continue to develop knowledge.

Narrative is a form of "meaning making". ... The narrative scheme serves as a lens through which the apparently independent and disconnected elements of existence are seen as related parts of a whole. At the level of a single life, the autobiographical narrative shows life as unified and whole. In stories about other lives and in histories of social groups, narrative shows the interconnectedness and significance of seemingly random activities. (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 36)

The collective narratives presented in this study represent only a small portion of the stories which are a part of my existence, and they are a small example of how I reflect on the stories to make meaning in order to gain knowledge. So, even though the stories can stand independent from each other, I do not understand them in this way, and I view the stories as integral to the process of the ongoing story of life. The stories represented as collective narratives in the form of themes express how the stories are interrelated in terms of experiences and ideas. For these reasons, each of the three narratives in this study is constructed through the identification of common experiences and ideas in the stories of the participants.

The reflection on the collective narratives in the study provides an example of how I make meaning and gain knowledge from our stories.

Mandler holds that knowledge is not an enumeration of discontinuous facts, rather it is an organized and structured composition of facts according to particular patterns. She proposes four kinds of structures that organize particular bits of information into knowledge. ... Schematic knowledge [which represents one kind of structure] is organized according to a part-whole configuration. ... in schematic organization, the entity is known through its participation in the collection. ... Narrative knowing is the ability to structure information according to the

schematic format. As Mandler has pointed out, schematically organized knowledge can be related either spatially, as when one collects and comes to know the aspects as part of a spatial whole, or temporally, as when one links together various events to make a story or a narrative. Schematic linking of events as narrative is the kind of knowing that is used to understand. (Polkinghorne, 1988, pp. 109-111)

The reflections presented in this study are mine as a Metis woman. They represent a form of discussion which shows how I organize bits of information presented to me and from me in the form of story and how I gain insights and knowledge from this experience. The reflection is a way to describe how I understand the knowledge which is presented in the sharing of stories. The reflection is a personal attempt to understand how knowledge is presented in stories as they form expressions of related parts of experiences and as they form a whole life experience.

Presenting a personal reflection as an example of how I make meaning and gain knowledge from our stories as a Metis woman is important as Kimberly Blaeser, a mixed blood woman, writes in her article "Native Literature: Seeking a Critical Center". She cites Uncle Luther, a character in Louis Owen's *The Sharpest Sight*, by advising that we must

know the stories of our people and make our own story, but we got to be aware of the stories they're making about us, and the way they change the stories we already know. ... we must be aware of the way our stories are being changed: "re-expressed" or "re-interpreted" to become a part of their story or their canon because, ... stories have political power: They're always making up stories, and that's how they [continue to] make the world the way they want it. (p. 53)

So, my reflection is my attempt to interpret and make meaning. It is my written attempt to break free from the "re-expression" and "re-interpretation" of our stories. I am seeking my own critical center in writing this thesis as a Metis woman.

In respect to my search for a critical center as a Metis woman, this study is valuable because it offers a reflection on, not the "re-interpretation" of, the meaning of Metis women's experiences as expressed through their stories from the perspective of a Metis woman. The intrinsic value of this study is the presentation of taped story telling conversations with four Metis women in three collective narratives. The collective narratives represent my critical center, my expression, not the "re-expression", of the stories as I understand them. The method of study is designed to reflect these experiences in a manner appropriate to the story telling conversation experience. The study attempts to provide as authentic an account as possible of these experiences expressed through stories without distorting them through the research process. I have taken several measures in the research process to minimize distortion and to attempt to reveal the meaning of these experiences and stories in the way that I understand them.

I have designed the study to ensure that I interpret meaning from an understanding and familiarity with the participants in terms of our social and cultural history. I present an emic view. Unlike many interpretive studies designed to reveal the subjective perspectives of participants where the

researcher comes from outside a particular culture and social group, I am conducting this study from within my cultural perspectives and within a set of personal relationships with the participants. I am a Metis woman who is studying Metis women. I am studying Metis women whom I have known personally and socially, and I am one of the Metis women that I study.

Although some Metis women may live in places or relationships that disconnect them from other Metis women or from a sense of Metis culture and history, I am a Metis woman with some sense of this culture and history.

My sense of this culture and history is not unlike the stories which I hear and have heard in my life. My sense of culture and history has been constantly evolving during my life as my understandings of these concepts continue to be informed and transformed as I live. The understanding of my culture is based in living my culture and not by defining it. There are many, many dimensions to how I understand my culture. However, one of the significant ways that I understand my culture involves my personal spiritual practises and the social events within my families. My historical understanding stems from stories and information about my Cree, Sioux, Ojibwa/Chippewa, Iroquois and French ancestors. I also understand the recent history of my First Nations and European ancestors and their displacement from their Metis community in Manitoba during the 1870's. These described understandings of my culture and history are just a small representation of the multifaceted and forever evolving nature of these concepts. My culture is something that I no longer attempt to

define. My culture is something that I live. As well, my history is being created as I live.

From this perspective and through the commonality of my life experiences as a Metis woman with the other participants, I am able to interpret the meanings of the experiences and stories of our group of Metis women as they are reflected in and represent a shared culture. However, I only speak for myself in the reflections contained in this thesis. And, because this reflection is constructed exclusively on the experience and stories of Metis women from the perspective of a Metis woman, it is distinct from accounts of other Indigenous women such as First Nations women and from non-Indigenous women.

A Metis woman, however, could provide an account of Metis women's experiences and stories from an objectivist standpoint, or from other perspectives that do not attempt to reflect meaning of participant experiences from a participant perspective. This study is committed to presenting the meaning of Metis participants' experiences from a Metis participant perspective. This study is constructed to present meaning from this perspective by approaching the experiences from within the subjectivity of the participants.

To reflect the subjective aspects of these experiences, first, I, the researcher, participated as one of the Metis women in the conversations that have been recorded for transcription and analysis. As a participant in my own study, I am immediately familiar with the participant experience which can be directly interpreted in the study and constitutes part of the framework and

shapes the sensibility into which the studied experience is interpreted. Second, I recorded the stories of participants with whom I have been acquainted and with whom I have a shared history. This familiarity affords insight into the meanings of experiences and stories shared by the participants that would not be available to someone who came to this group from outside this shared experience. Third, participants reviewed the transcripts and they released the stories for my use in this study. The stories, then written as collective narratives, represent my view of our experiences and stories in a manner that does not distort or misrepresent the stories as they were spoken. This care to present the experiences and stories of four Metis women as collective narratives from my perspective as a Metis woman, and to offer a reflection on these narratives as both a Metis woman and as a participant constitutes the unique contribution of this thesis to scholarly discourse on narrative of Indigenous people.

As well, the unique contribution of this study consists in presenting the story telling of Metis women directly as a common form of cultural practise. In my research of the literature, I have found no other study which does this. As my review of the literature in the next chapter will show, much story telling by Metis women is presented within the genre of novel, short story, poetry or juvenile literature where the voice of Metis women is presented as a literary art form. These literary forms construct Metis women's voices within the framework of aesthetic or artistic public presentation. In contrast, this study

presents the experiences and story telling of Metis women within the realism of their daily practise. While transcriptions of our conversations about life experiences were edited into themes in the form of collective narratives, they were not edited or reconstructed for aesthetic or literary purposes. The stories are presented as they were spoken.

In providing an account for the voice of Metis women, this study was designed within two significant delimitations. First, the study does not offer a generic or universal account of the experiences and stories of all Metis women. Instead, it offers a particular account of only four Metis women. The issue here is not to represent all Metis women from this one investigation, but rather to offer some insight that reveals the subjective perspective of one group. Within the delimitation of the study to four participants who have a shared social history, the study is not intended to generalize to other groups of Metis women who have not shared our social history. These other groups of Metis women can tell their own stories.

Second, this study was designed to be undertaken within certain time delimitations. The conversations for this study were recorded in two hour time periods during the summer of 1995. The two hour length of the conversations provided the opportunity for a limited number of stories and experiences to be expressed. Longer conversations and more sessions would have afforded the expression of more stories and experiences from which the collective narratives could be constructed and reflected on. As well, the content of the

conversations is limited to the historical occasion when the conversations were recorded. The content of the conversations is determined by the stories which were told by the participants at the time. Conversations recorded a day, month, or year earlier could have been very different.

This study is also significant because it describes our experiences as Metis women by themes in the form of collective narratives which emerge from our stories. These stories are based on the life experiences of the Metis women who participated in this study. The construction of the collective narrative describes how I understand the stories and how I make meaning in order to gain knowledge. Sharing stories is the way knowledge is often shared among Metis women. As well, it is significant to reflect on the collective narrative in order to build an information base of knowledge which is presented as a cultural insider, as a Metis woman. Often, my experiences as a Metis woman have not been described or reflected on in an accurate way according to my experiences and my knowledge. I have, over time, encountered many assumptions, generalisations, and judgements about my experiences as a Metis woman, and these presupposed ideas have been inaccurate. Since my experience and knowledge have not been valued and represented in an accurate way, this study is an account of how I reflect on the stories of Metis women and how I make meaning in order to gain knowledge. Third, it is significant to experience the process of designing and implementing a research study so that I can know how to perform this task in the future. The

experience, the story, which emerges from completing the research study will give me access to a process which I can use in order to continue to develop myself and my community. As a Metis woman I have not been able to access a Metis person as a mentor in my graduate studies program. If I learn skills as a researcher, then in the future I may be able to develop along with my community in the role as a mentor for a Metis person.

Everything Exists in Circles, He Said

My father once told me that beginnings are just a point in time and that everything exists in circles. And then he explained what he meant by this by telling me some stories. This thesis document is an example of these same notions. This thesis document describes a beginning in time and a slice of an experience. This thesis document is intended to provide new knowledge, yet it only exists in its form in order to be built upon with subsequent research endeavours. The preview of this thesis is as follows. Chapter One describes how the thesis document began, a description of the study, and its importance and significance. Chapter Two reviews the literature. Specifically, it discusses the written stories by Metis women available to date and how narrative is a way to order life experiences into events which make meaning and provide a form of knowledge. Chapter Three presents a discussion of the methodology and method used during the course of the research study. The next three chapters present the stories of the four Metis women participants in the form of collective narratives: Chapter Four - the theme of Identity; Chapter Five - the

theme of Family, and Chapter Six - the theme of Soul Murder. Following the collective narrative in each of Chapters Four, Five, and Six, is my reflection on the stories as a Metis woman. Chapter Seven completes the writing of the thesis document by presenting a link between the purpose of my study, the academic literature related to my study, and the findings of my research. At the end of Chapter Seven, I present one more story and collective narrative to complete this particular project and equally as a point of beginning as I continue to experience how, in fact, beginnings are just a point in time and everything does exist in circles.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

As previously mentioned, I have been intrigued by stories during the course of my lifetime, and I am interested in how I understand the stories and how I make meaning from the stories and gain knowledge. In order to ground my research study, which aims at investigating my intrigue and interest in stories, I have conducted a review of literature pertaining to the following areas. I have reviewed stories by Metis women. I have discovered that some of the stories by Metis women are available in the form of literary works. These literary works include novels, short stories, poetry and juvenile literature. I have also discovered that there are academic types of writing about these literary works and about the stories of Metis women. The first section of this chapter will review this material. As well, in this chapter I will present a discussion about stories as an expression of human existence, the study of meaning in stories, and stories, meaning and knowledge. Having defined the areas of my review of the literature, I am describing how I understand my study is grounded within existing written materials and how it may become a part of the body of knowledge which is emerging about Metis women.

The Stories of Metis Women

During the course of my review of the literature I discovered that stories of Metis women were generally contained within literary types of work. This work includes novels, short stories, poetry and juvenile literature. I limit my discussion below to Metis women who proclaim that they are Metis and their published works. I assume that there are many forms of stories by Metis women which are not available for public use. As an example, I maintain my own journals which really are a form of describing my stories and the events in my life which create these stories. So, the stories which I present below are those written by Metis women, they are published and available to the general public. The stories which I use in my study differ in that they are stories which we share between ourselves during our conversations as we experience life. The literary works are, at this point in time, the available materials to review in order to gain some sense of the stories which are shared by Metis women.

In 1973, Maria Campbell published her well known autobiography Halfbreed. This novel introduced the public to an account of Maria Campbell's experiences in life as a Metis child. She describes her life as she grew up in Northern Saskatchewan as one of the road allowance people. Her early years were ones of joy, family, hard work, poverty and sorrow. As a very young woman, Maria Campbell marries and then she becomes disconnected from the community where she grew up. Her life continues as she struggles with drug addiction and contemplated suicide. The autobiographical novel also describes

how Maria Campbell enters into recovery and how the issues of racism, hatred, addiction and displacement have influenced her life.

In Search of April Raintree by Beatrice Culleton was first published in 1983. This novel is also an autobiographical account. The lives of two Metis sisters are described as they become removed from their family and community. The story of their growing up years in Manitoba continues to speak about the rejecting and abusive society which they experience. The novel describes survival and the need to come to terms with the life events which created a difficult world in which the sister had to survive.

In 1988, Lee Maracle published I Am Woman. In this novel, Lee Maracle describes the struggle to understand the casualties of life and spirit as a Metis woman. She uses storytelling, autobiography and poetry in this novel as she articulates her attempt to understand the teachings of her people and the reality of the world in which she lives.

Bobbi Lee, Indian Rebel (1990) is also an autobiographical novel in which Lee Maracle describes the struggle towards political consciousness as a Metis woman. Her struggle is described through her life story as she tries to understand the political, racist and sexist forces which are evident in her experiences. The novel is also an example of how the author struggles to come to terms with owning her own voice and the ways in which she is aware of the reclamation of herself. She describes this struggle as part of the production of the novel.

There are two voices in the pages of this book, mine and Donald Barnett's. As-told-tos between whites and Natives rarely work, when they do, it's wonderful, when they don't it's a disaster for the Native. Don never intended it to be a disaster for me. The first *Bobbi Lee* was the reduction of some two hundred pages of manuscript to a little book. What began as a class to learn how to do other people's life history, turned into a project to do my own. We had disagreements over what to include and what to exclude, disagreements over wording, voice. In the end, the voice that reached the paper was Don's, the information alone was mine. ... at the time, I did not know enough to do it myself, nor argue him out of the way in which my life was presented. ... [as a result of this contradiction] he did inspire me to get command of my voice. (Maracle, 1990, p. 19)

Lee Maracle has also published two other novels. Sundogs (1992) is a novel which describes the journey of one native family during the time of Meech Lake and the Oka crisis. The perspectives of the native family are provided in the novel and they offer insights into spiritual and cultural developments during these historical events. Ravensong: A Novel (1993) is a story about an urban Native community and their forced adaptation to a flu epidemic which almost destroys them during the 1950's. The novel describes the challenge of a young Native woman as she learns to balance her life between two cultural viewpoints. The young native woman searches for answers to difficult questions as she integrates her nativeness with the society in which she lives.

An example of a short story by a Metis woman can be found in Our Grandmothers' Lives as Told in Their Own Words by Freda Ahenakew and H.C. Wolfart (1992). In "Household Chores", Irene Calliou describes her life as a Metis woman and the roles and responsibilities associated with her family. She tells the story in Cree and the English translation is provided. Irene Calliou

provides an account of the tasks which she performs as a woman. These tasks include aspects of surviving life lived in the bush.

Emma LaRocque writes a different kind of short story. In Living the Changes she uses story intertwined with a social and political commentary about her experiences as a Metis woman. In "Tides, Towns and Trains" she provides an account which leads us through a series of events in her life and how these events have formed her view of the world. She continues the story by discussing the history of colonization towards her people and the struggle to accept the contradictions and ironies of her experiences. She writes, "for what does a Native woman scholar do when she has had to "master" the very authors and materials that have always left her with the knowledge that they "see", but they do not see?" (LaRocque, 1990, p. 85).

But I was born asking, and with eyes that can never close. The real wishing I do entails the transformation of people and of society. But how shall we transform the oppressed and the oppressor? And upon whose shoulders, whose consciousness does the task of transformation fall? I cannot trust ideological formulas. And I cannot be satisfied with conformity. I have known the shadows. I have heard the voices crying in the night. I have seen the sleeping. I know

the sorrow of the poor
the sorrow of woman
the sorrow of Native
the sorrow of the earth
the world that is with me
in me
of me.

(LaRocque, 1990, p. 90)

The poetry of Willow Barton, Maria Campbell, Bren Kolson, Emma LaRocque, Alice Lee, Lee Maracle, Clare E. McNab, Loretta Miskinack, SkyBlue Mary Morin, Elizabeth Robinson, and Robin Young describes the stories and lives of these Metis women. Their published work describes part of their life stories within the genre of poetry. The poetry is rich, and descriptions of such topics as understanding identity, the role of Metis women, Metis women as victims, healing, change and social conditions are presented in their work.

The identity of Metis women is described as understanding oneself as a mixed-blood woman.

Discrimination and Prejudice

I've been having mixed feelings lately.
I have been blessed with
unusual looks.
For years I used to find myself
plain and, on bad days, ugly.
Why wasn't I given the
beautiful dark hair and good
looks of my older sister, or
the fair thick hair and
blue eyes of my younger sister?

Here I am in the middle.
Hair that is not dark or light.
Features that are mixed, large
nose, high cheekbones, fair
skin, double chin. Eyes that
can change from yellow to
green, the black spot inside
very small or very large.

How I hate the word "Moonias."
It is said with a sneer.
Laughter, poke, "I thought you
were 'mooniaskwew'."
I have to work very hard
to be accepted. Why can't I
be me?

Deep inside I feel tempted.
To hell with these Indian
and Metis who are so petty
and discriminate against one
another. You have too much
education, you'll never fit in.
Who made you an elder?
You are not qualified to
talk about that.

Where do I fit? As I
went home a few weeks ago
and drove alongside the lake,
I had a feeling of incredible sadness.

I could feel my grandfathers and
grandmother there, with no
one left to need or ask for their help.

When we reached our old house,
I had fun exploring
the hills and the buildings
with my two children. Whatever
spirits were there were soothing
and reassuring. This was where I belonged.

I picked some rocks,
so I could take some
of that feeling with me wherever
I may go.
I know who I am.
I just have to stop proving
it to everyone else.
DAMN!

(McNab, 1990, pp. 199-201)

"The Uniform of the Dispossessed" by Emma LaRocque and "Lesson" by Alice Lee in Writing the Circle edited by Perreault and Vance (1990) are also examples of poetry by Metis women which describes an understanding of identity.

The role of Metis women involves many dimensions such as our relationships with our children, men, families and communities. "Where Have the Warriors Gone?" by Willow Barton; "Bonding with Mother Earth" and "Ahow, Holy Woman" by SkyBlue Mary Morin in Writing the Circle edited by Perreault and Vance (1990) are examples of poetry which describes aspects of the role of Metis women. From Emma LaRocque's collection of "Mom Poems":

The Last Journey

As I expected
 We threw pawfuls of earth on her casket
 Wishing her well
 As unexpected
 The N.A.R. train whistled a farewell.
 The loneliest, damned whistle I ever heard.

Train, blow a long, lonely whistle.
 When coming down the railroad tracks.
 My mother won't be there
 To meet you,
 Waiting for her wayward children
 At Mile 213, Chard.

(LaRocque, 1990, p. 145)

As well, the poetry describes the experiences which Metis women have had as victims of abuse. This abuse is racial, physical, sexual, verbal, emotional and psychological in nature. "confession", and "Sasha shaves the unwanted hair from her legs shaves the" by Alice Lee; "Valley of Mist" by Loretta Miskenack; "Reflections", "Don't" and "Mind Game" by Robin Young in Writing the Circle edited by Perreault and Vance (1990) and "Ghosts" by Lee Maracle in Our Bit of Truth edited by Agnes Grant (1990) are examples of poetry which describe experiences of abuse. The poem "child's play" by Alice Lee describes the experience of absenting during the trauma of an incident of sexual abuse. The experience of absenting has allowed those of us who have experienced this type of trauma to survive.

child's play

the child sits on the toy shelf
 watching the sleeping doll on the bed
 the child knows the doll dreams
 of a tongue
 in her white throat
 in the dream the tongue becomes
 a red hot knife
 cutting into the white of her throat
 to escape the doll turns her head
 into the soft white pillow
 but the pillow has turned red
 the night has turned red
 there is no escape
 the doll must finish the dream
 the child sits on the toy shelf
 watching

(Lee, 1990, p. 159)

The poetry also describes how the Metis women attempt to heal and understand their life experiences as victims. "The Women's Drum", "A Sioux Sweat" and "Spiritual Singer" by SkyBlue Mary Morin; and "Celebration: Drum of Life" by Bren Kolson in Writing the Circle edited by Perreault and Vance (1990) are examples of poetry by Metis women which describes healing processes and practices. Healing ourselves is a spiritual journey.

Hear the Drum Speak

Hear the Drum speak.
Let it remind you
of days with the Old Woman,
the Visions she saw
the Dreams she had.

Hear the Drum speak
of days of learning
to smoke the Pipe
of burning Tobacco
and Sweetgrass.

Hear the Drum speak
of days we Fasted
for guidance
from the Creator
and in gratitude.

Hear the Drum speak...

(Morin, 1990, p. 218)

This healing leads to change which is presented in terms of renewing culture after its breakdown; becoming political in voice and thought; becoming aware of the social realities in which we live and becoming educated in order to be a part of the change as it is occurring. "Suppressed" and "Rodeo Men" by Elizabeth Robinson in Writing the Circle edited by Perreault and Vance (1990) and "The Geese Over the City" by Emma LaRocque in Our Bit of Truth edited by Agnes Grant (1990) are examples of poetry which describes change. For example,

When I First Came to the City

And the streets!
 Look at the streets
 All in parallels and perpendiculars
 Spawning concrete erectiles,
 Straight-ups, phallus-powers
 As if afraid of earth
 And her Kiva gentleness.

And the people!
 Look at the people
 All in hustle and ghastly hassle
 Spawning spurts and slapdash
 Daze, dearth and spectral frazzle
 As if afraid of calm
 And her composed silence.

Do you know that sometimes still
 I amble through the streets
 searching for a brown face
 for warmth
 and loitering grace.

(LaRocque, 1990, p. 341)

The juvenile literature which has been published by Metis women is mostly directed for use in a classroom setting. This material consists of basically two forms. The first form is that of stories for children about Metis culture and ways of seeing the world. For example, Achimoona and Stories of the Road Allowance People by Maria Campbell, and Spirit of the White Bison by Beatrice Culleton provide stories from these Metis women in order to be used for children in their reading. The second form of juvenile literature includes resource types of materials which present stories and information about Metis people in an accurate and historical way. For example, Maria

Campbell provides resource materials in the books People of the Buffalo: How the Plains Indians Lived and Riel's People: How the Metis Lived. The two forms of juvenile literature provide an opportunity for educators to use material which has been written by Metis women themselves.

The above-mentioned literary works by Metis women are discussed academically by Metis women themselves and by other academics. For example, Kimberly Blaeser, who is a mixed blood American woman, provides an analysis of literary works by American Indian authors. She challenges contemporary norms by attempting to create critiques from her perspective as a mixed blood woman. She describes her position in attempting to find her own critical center in her contribution to the book Looking at the Words of Our People: First Nations Analysis of Literature which has been edited by the Canadian Indigenous author Jeannette Armstrong. Kimberly Blaeser's article "Native Literature: Seeking a Critical Center" describes the struggle to identify and practise an Indigenous form of academic and scholarly discourse in the force of the powerful and rigid requirements which demand analysis of Indigenous literature according to the already established norms of critique within the discipline. She identifies a struggle which I have experienced as a Metis woman. My entire thesis is the expression of the struggle as I attempt to present our stories, as I view them, and to validate their existence as a form of knowledge. Blaeser explains the struggle that Indigenous scholars have as we attempt to articulate our voice and the methods which we use in order to do

this. This struggle is not only about articulating our voice and methods for we are also challenged to have our ideas accepted as valid by already existing norms within the disciplines of academe.

In my view, Janice Acoose, a Canadian Metis woman, provides a similar challenge to the norms of critique within her discipline. Her recently published book Iskwewak-Kah'Ki Yaw Ni: Neither Indian Princesses Nor Easy Squaws was originally published as her Master of Arts Thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1992. As a Metis woman author, Janice Acoose necessarily and effectively performs an analysis of the powerful influences of society over the voices of Indigenous writers and peoples. She, in effect, presents in her book the practise of what Kimberly Blaeser describes as essential in order to give an accurate voice for Indigenous peoples. Janice Acoose identifies the misrepresentation of our social, political and economic realities by discussing published literature and how the images of Indigenous women within those collections are portrayed. Rightly so, she challenges those portrayed images and performs the task of deconstructing inaccuracies and misrepresentations which are contained in the literature that forms the focus of her study.

An example of literary criticism of First Nations literature within the established norms of critique exists in The Native in Literature: Canadian and Comparative Perspectives edited by Thomas King, Cheryl Calver and Helen Hoy. Within this text I found a collection of academic essays which analyses concepts particular to literary works and pertaining specifically to Native

literature. This text is a series of academic essays which describes the relationships between Native literature and the body of writing generally referred to as literature.

The voice and stories of Metis women is also presented in Contemporary Challenges: Conversations with Canadian Native Authors by Hartmut Lutz.

Contained in this text is a collection of conversations which have been transcribed and presented in written text. The book contains conversations with Metis women authors, but the contents of the discussions present views and opinions about their writing, their writing processes, politics, and views of the world in general. As well, this publication is limited to published authors, and so it discusses their contributions and the contributions of other First Nations authors as they pertain to the publishing industry.

An example of writing from others about Metis women is presented in the book In Our Own Words - Northern Saskatchewan Metis Women Speak Out by Dolores T. Poelzer and Irene A. Poelzer. This book allows for the voices of Metis women to be heard, but they are seldom described in the form of stories. The voices of the Metis women are used in an effective way in order to present a sociological analysis of the lives of the women. This book is an example of an academic analysis of the voice of the Metis women from a sociological perspective. The authors Poelzer and Poelzer analyze the perceptions and experiences of Metis women in Northern Saskatchewan by categorizing their stories. The categories follow the norms of sociological analysis in terms of

employment, culture, religion, education and the like. For example,

"It makes a difference"

Many women saw education as a key to employment, that is, to making a living. They stated that education is "important basically for getting a job," and stressed that "you got to have an education if you want to do anything." They felt that lack of education resulted in their having to take the lowest paid jobs such as "store clerking, babysitting and housework." Office jobs such as typist and "secretaries or bookkeepers" were not available to women "without the schooling and training." One woman pointed out how she secured an office job because she had the needed education. (Poelzer & Poelzer, 1986, p. 98)

As well, there are other academic and written materials which discuss Metis people. These writings involve all aspects of academe and include disciplines and areas of study such as history and psychology. Of the literature which I reviewed in this second area, the authors performed studies and wrote according to their disciplines. In the review of the literature pertaining to the stories of Metis women, or writings about Metis women, I did not find material which describes the stories of Metis women in themes as collective narratives, nor did I find a reflection on stories as an example of making meaning and gaining knowledge.

The Stories of the Four Metis Women in this Study

The nature of the stories which are the focus of this study is that they emerged during the process of conversing with one another. I was not interested in describing only traditional First Nations' stories. Rather, I wanted to describe the themes in the form of collective narratives as they emerged

from all the different stories which are based on our life experiences. "Because Cree knowledge is thoroughly contexted in experience, Preston argues that it is most appropriately communicated (following Cree tradition) in the language of the narrative" (Ridington, 1990, p. 108). I also understand 'story' and 'narrative' to be synonymous terms, and I have used story to refer to the term narrative in an interchangeable way. "Narrative can refer to the process of making a story ... the term 'story' is equivalent to 'narrative' " (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 13). I have preferred to use the word 'story' because it is embodied in our common use of language, and 'narrative' is not.

Stories are embedded in our everyday conversations. Sometimes, the stories we share are the stories of others, or events, or creative interpretations, or a mixture of First Nations philosophy and present day reality. There are no parameters to this form of story because its form is born in the moment it is spoken. However, it is an expected practise to give reference to the person that a story belongs to if it is not our story. The story is a combination of the head and our ability to think, and of the heart and our ability to feel. Ridington (1990) describes this idea in the following way:

Academic learning generally views information as objective and therefore removed from the learner's experience. Indian learning is contextualised within experiences, so that a distinction between separate objective and subjective realities becomes meaningless.
(p. 3)

I cannot separate these processes when I tell my own stories. My stories inform the total practise of my life because my knowledge is based on

my experience and because I "...believe strongly in the authority of personal experience...to 'know something' is to have experienced it personally" (Ridington, 1990, p. 211). This thesis will describe and reflect upon the many themes which emerged from our stories as an example of a form of our knowledge.

Another important aspect of the thesis is that it focuses on researching stories which were created by Metis women. It is important to say these things as a Metis woman because I am from a special group of women, and when we tell our stories, we "participate in the process of interpretation because we share a history of community membership and experience with the narrator" (Grumet, 1991, p. 68). There have been many times in my life when my voice has become subsumed under the voice of 'women' or 'First Nations women' or 'minority women' or something of the sort. It is very important to say that I, as a Metis woman, own a certain set of experiences which sets me separate and apart even from my blood sisters in that "stories are culturally coded interpretations of personal and collective experience" (Ridington, 1990, p. 14). The reasons for these different experiences, and consequently my different voice, are very much based on the historical, political and social realities in which I have lived. Since I have had my own set of experiences, it is important to me as a Metis woman that my voice be described and reflected on because "narrative as a cultural symbol(ization)...contributes to the continuity and shaping of the life of the community" (Grumet, 1991, p. 68).

Therefore, the stories which describe and reflect my experiences form the basis of my voice as a Metis woman. In this research study, our stories as Metis women were recorded while engaging in conversations because it is important for

...all of us (to) develop what we have...I couldn't tell you your people's story...How can a white person tell you another white person, about my community and my people,...The bear doesn't try to tell the deer's story. The tiger lily doesn't try to tell the dandelion story. It's a full-time job just looking after your own stuff (story). (Campbell, 1991, p. 58)

Stories as an Expression of Human Existence

In an attempt to understand how stories make meaning and represent a form of knowledge, I have examined literature in areas generally referred to as narrative, meaning of narrative, and narrative meaning as a form of knowledge. As I uncovered the dimensions of these areas of literature, I have come to understand that narrative is fundamentally basic to many forms of study including those of narrative expression, history, literature, and psychology, just to name a few. In order to ground this study theoretically, I needed to understand how a study of this nature would fit into this vast and encompassing world of available literature. In addition, I needed to choose, within the study of narrative as a whole, what particular aspect of narrative this study relates to. To begin this discussion, I found the explanation of human existence and narrative meaning by Polkinghorne (1988) in Narrative and Knowing in the Human Sciences. He states that "human existence is a systemic synthesis of

multiple kinds of reality, and identifies narrative meaning as an aspect of one of these realities" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 1).

In order to further ground the study of narrative, meaning and knowledge, Polkinghorne presents his view that human existence includes three realms of reality. These realms are material, organic, and mental in nature. It is in the category of the mental realm that, based on Polkinghorne's research, I ground this study. The mental realm of human existence describes narrative meaning as one process and function of organizing elements of our awareness into meaningful bits of information. The process and function of creating narratives allows the emergence of different kinds of realities. Polkinghorne also states that the theory of the emergence of multiple realities is an examination, in detail, of the operation of the most evolved of the kinds of realities which is contained within the mental realm.

Based on the concept of creating narrative as a function within the mental realm in the form of multiple realities, the emergent nature of human evolution allows for the creation of new levels of reality. Polkinghorne describes how this emergent evolution, the creation of narrative, forms the basis for the development of new structures and properties in order to gain meaning. In this ongoing process of development, the organizational structures of earlier levels of meaning are recombined into still more complex higher-order structures in order to produce additional novel characteristics. So, each level of meaning which emerges contains earlier levels of meaning and new levels

which are cumulative in nature.

Polkinghorne also contends that there are two dramatic thresholds for the organization of human existence. One threshold is the transition from matter to life and the other is the transition from life to consciousness. The transition of life to consciousness holds the key to the concept of meaning. As he described it, "emergence of human beings from life in general to reflective consciousness and language is a threshold change that has brought about a unique level of reality that I call the 'order of meaning'" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p.2).

If, in fact, our human existence is ordered into the three basic structures of material (matter), organic (life), and meaning (consciousness), then I can begin to understand where this study is located by exploring the realm of meaning in terms of human existence. As well, in order to understand how the realm of meaning pertains to this study as an expression of meaning and a form of knowledge, I must understand how this meaning is created through narrative. Polkinghorne explains that meaning is influenced not only by the combination of realities, meaning the material, organic and mental realms, but that this meaning is cumulative, builds on previous meaning, and is not limited to only the individual creating the meaning. Meaning, as described through narrative as a process in the mental realm of human existence, also includes how individuals are part of social groups and cultures. So, the creation of meaning is not just a solitary, individual act. The creation of meaning is the

intersection of describing human existence in the form of narrative as a combination of the three realms of reality, the emergence of cumulative forms of meaning, and the description of the meaning contained within the individuals in their social and cultural environment.

My thesis, which is a description of the stories of four Metis women in the form of a collective narrative, and my reflection on these stories as an example of how I make meaning as a form of knowledge can be described as follows:

One of the projects of the mental realm is knowledge of the whole self. ... The activity of self study can be carried out in the ordinary and informal manner of self-reflection, or in an organized and formal way following scientific methods. The knowledge produced by the human disciplines, for example, is an organized articulation of one part of the human realm differentiating itself in order to comprehend its own characteristics. (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 3)

As well, the thesis is "not limited to the internal organization of individual persons. It extends to the orders of cultural rules and language systems in which individuals are conjoined in social groups. ... [and is a description of] a special stratum of the environment - that is, culture and meaning - in which we exist" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 3).

The Study of Meaning in Stories

As a human being, I do not separate my human existence into realms of material (matter), organic (life), and meaning (consciousness). These parts of my humanity are fused together, and they interact with each other on a constant basis. Narrative, and the study of meaning, is only one of the

operations of the realms of my human existence. This study is an attempt to describe and to reflect on how I, as a Metis woman, make this meaning from our stories. Polkinghorne further assists in this endeavour by describing the realm of meaning as an activity, not a thing or substance. Further, he contends that the products of this activity, or process, are not just a simple description of an element of human existence. He states that making meaning also involves how we describe elements of human existence in terms of one perception being the same or not the same as another; one is similar or dissimilar to another; one is an instance of another; one stands for the other; one is part of the other; or one is the cause of the other (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 4). So, the process of making meaning is an activity which includes not just a simple description of an element of human existence, but it is an example of the ongoing making of meaning through numerous types of relationships and connectedness between elements in human existence.

As I attempt to explain and study the meaning in the stories of four Metis women, I understand the activity as a process which is produced by the mental realm of human existence. Stories describe

the connections or relationships among events and their meaning. Meanings are not produced only by individuals who register certain experiences as connected to others. Cultures maintain a system of language and pass on to succeeding generations knowledge. ... Cultures also maintain collections of typical narrative meanings in their myths, fairy tales, histories and stories. To participate as a member of a culture requires a general knowledge of its full range of accumulated meanings. (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 6)

Stories, Meaning and Knowledge

Building on the understanding that meaning is derived from an activity of the mental realm of human existence, what does it mean to know something?

Eleanor Kutz and Hephzibah Roskelly, in their publication An Unquiet

Pedagogy: Transforming Practice in the English Classroom, offer the

explanation that

an important mode of knowing - one that's intuitive more than rational, and that represents its meaning in stories rather than logical syllogisms and formulae is 'narrative knowing'. This 'narrative knowing' accounts for a large part of the way we make sense of our world, and we use it in our most mundane conversations as well as our most significant texts of literature, history, religion. When we select details from the flux of [human] experience and shape them into a story, we're also engaging in naming, abstracting from, and restructuring the raw data of [human existence], and in finding its patterns of meaning. (p. 45)

So, if meaning is derived from an activity of the mental realm of human existence as a mode of knowing, then I can begin to understand the intrigue which stories have provided for me in my life. I have always known that I get something out of listening to stories which is not merely the retelling of an experience. There has been something else which is added in a fundamental way to my knowledge and my learning. When I hear and tell stories I make meaning, perform the activity of the mental realm, and I engage in transferring knowledge in the process. With this in mind, the stories which I hear and tell with Metis women provides an opportunity to share stories within the culture. "All cultures have stories, but some are especially attuned to the ways that stories represent important knowledge and meanings for the society, and they

particularly value the words and the wisdom of the storyteller" (Kutz, 1991, p. 45).

As I further come to understand the connection between stories, meaning and knowledge, I also come to understand how the articulation of these concepts as interrelated with each other creates a certain challenge for me as a Metis woman. It is not just the simple task of understanding the relationship of these concepts to my study, but I am also engaged in a common endeavour with other First Nations colleagues as "we search for ways to continue our relations, to maintain our languages and cultures, and to develop our unique Aboriginal ways of relating and knowing" (Battiste, 1995, p. xvi). In terms of my work and this study, I am one of the First Nations scholars attempting to describe our unique way of relating and knowing as expressed in our stories. I now realize that I have always been one of

those who seek to understand the reality of existence and harmony with the environment by turning inward [and I belong to] a different, incorporeal knowledge paradigm that might be termed Aboriginal epistemology. Aboriginal people have the responsibility and the birthright to take and develop an epistemology congruent with holism and the beneficial transformation of human knowledge. The way to this affirmation is through our own Aboriginal sources. (Ermine, 1995, p. 103)

The attempt to understand stories, meaning and knowledge as a Metis woman has been a challenge for me. I have been challenged to articulate how I understand the relationship between the telling and hearing of stories which are central to the everyday life experiences which I have had and the meaning and knowledge which I gain from them. I am one of the 'Aboriginal sources',

and the stories which I am immersed in are an opportunity for me to gain knowledge. The creation of this knowledge, however, exists within my own view and articulation of my experiences as an 'Aboriginal source'. "For the Cree, the phenomenon of *mamatowan* refers not just to the self but to the being in connection with happenings. It also recognizes that other life forms manifest the creative force in the context of the knower. It is an experience in context, a subjective experience that, for the knower, becomes knowledge in itself. The experience is knowledge" (Ermine, 1995, p. 104). The expression of my experience is my story and my knowledge.

As a further understanding of stories, meaning and knowledge from my perspective, I also clearly recognize that there is not a defined research path of study for me to follow as a Metis woman. I am an 'Aboriginal source' and I am just beginning to articulate in a scholarly way how I make meaning and gain knowledge from our stories. This is a tremendous challenge for me since I am not one of those "people [who] hold[s] onto the belief that there is one way, one truth and one knowledge" (Monture-Angus, 1995, p. 88), yet I have not been able to find an example of a research path of study to follow. Without a clearly defined path for study, the discussion of stories, meaning and knowledge in this thesis is my best attempt at this time to make sense of my own life experiences, to share them in the form of story and to gain knowledge. This study has emerged as I continue to engage in the story, the meaning, and the knowledge which has been given to me.

I am still struggling to learn. Most of the wise people I know do not have university degrees. Wisdom comes from what we do with our life experiences. Wisdom is about how we make our life experiences work for us, after we have worked to understand what they mean. ... The way that I understand things, each of us has at least one gift from the Creator which is meant to be shared with the people. It is important that each of us is able to identify and understand what our gifts are. My gift is the ability to tell stories about life (usually my life). (Monture-Angus, 1995, pp. 77-78)

Based on the review of the literature presented in this chapter, I have discovered and discussed the stories of Metis women as published in literary forms by Metis women. I have also reviewed documents which discuss Metis women by Metis women themselves or by others. I have further reviewed the literature on narrative, meaning and knowledge. What I have not been able to discover is a document which discusses the stories of Metis women as written in collective narratives and their meaning as a form of knowledge written by a Metis woman. From my inquiry, since I have not been able to find a study of this type available as a document, I believe that my study may be unique in this area. In describing the stories of four Metis women in the form of collective narratives and reflecting on these stories as an example of how I make meaning in order to gain knowledge, I as a Metis woman, am attempting to add to the emergence of knowledge. I present this study as a written description of this endeavour.

CHAPTER THREE

CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Research Design of the Study

This study is based on a qualitative research design. In order to describe the stories of four Metis women by theme in the form of collective narratives, and to reflect on the narratives as an example of how I interpret and make meaning in order to gain knowledge, it is important to use qualitative inquiry. A qualitative research design best serves the intent of this study because it is "more sensitive to and adaptable to many mutual shaping influences and value patterns that may be encountered" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 40). Also, qualitative research design is more adaptable to dealing with multiple realities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Qualitative inquiry provides an opportunity for the researcher to explore meaning in its particular social context. Meaning is a socially constructed phenomenon, and "since qualitative researchers deal with multiple realities, socially constructed realities or "qualities" that are complex and indivisible into discrete variables, they regard their research task as coming to understand and interpret how the various participants in a social setting construct the world around them" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 6). Not only is meaning socially

constructed, but multiple realities of this social construction also exist. By using qualitative inquiry in this study, I am then able to attempt to describe the complexity of the use of stories as a way to make meaning and to gain knowledge as a Metis woman.

The Description of How the Study was Accomplished

This study, in its initial stages, was outlined in the thesis proposal which I submitted and discussed with my committee members. After their approval, and approval from the University of Saskatchewan Advisory Committee on Ethics in Human Experimentation (Behavioral Sciences), I began the process of implementing the research study.

In the interest of collecting data for the study, it was important for me to use conversations as a method of data collection. "A conversation is a process of two people understanding each other. Thus, it is characteristic of every true conversation that each opens him/herself to the other person, truly accepts his/her point of view as worthy of consideration and gets inside the other to such an extent that he/she understands not a particular individual, but what he/she says" (Gadamer, 1984, p. 347). Stories, which are housed in conversations, gave me the data which I was seeking in order to uncover some of the social complexity which I was attempting to describe and reflect on. It has been my experience that these stories emerge in a natural way during the process of conversing with one another. In order to maintain authenticity and spontaneity in the data collection process, I depended on using conversations

as the best method to collect the data. "Conversations as a research method is very likely to yield stories as data" (Florio-Ruane, 1991, p. 240).

Since I was particularly interested in researching the stories of Metis women as I experience them in my everyday life, I chose conversation as the method to collect data rather than an interview situation. My intent in the research process was not to control the collection of data. I wanted to provide an account of our stories as they emerged in a natural way. In my understanding of providing this account, I did not intend to predetermine the types of stories told or the way the stories were told by preparing a series of interview questions.

Mishler (1986) discusses some of the limitations of the interview process which I was particularly concerned about and which led me to choose conversation as the preferred method of data collection. Mishler states that as researchers

giving serious attention to stories as topics for investigation makes us reexamine some of the core presuppositions and aims of standard interviewing practice, where respondents' stories are suppressed in that their responses are limited to "relevant" answers to narrowly specified questions. If storytelling and story comprehension are natural and pervasive modes of communicating meaning, and if the suppression of respondents' stories is a central feature of the traditional approach, then giving story analysis a prominent place has broad implications for interview research. ...

Telling stories is far from unusual in everyday conversation and it is apparently no more unusual for interviewees to respond to questions with narratives if they are given some room to speak. In general, researchers in the mainstream tradition either have not recognized the pervasiveness of stories because, as I have

already remarked, the standard survey interview "suppresses" them, or have treated stories as a problem because they are difficult to code and quantify. We are more likely to find stories reported in studies using relatively unstructured interviews where respondents are invited to speak in their own voices, allowed to control the introduction and flow of topics, and encouraged to extend their responses. Nonetheless respondents may also tell stories in response to direct, specific questions if they are not interrupted by interviewers trying to keep them to the "point." (pp. 68-69)

After I chose conversations as the method to collect the data, I planned to conduct conversations with three Metis women participants for the study, and I planned to include my voice as the fourth participant. I selected four participants in respect to an understanding of balance in terms of representation of voice for the study.

[Four is] an ancient symbol used by almost all the Native people of North and South America. There are many different ways that this basic concept is expressed: the four grandfathers, the four winds, the four cardinal directions; and many other relationships that can be expressed in sets of four. (Bopp, Bopp, Brown & Lane, 1984, p. 9)

The concept of four expressed a form of balance and community to me.

The participants in the study were chosen because of my relationship with them and the privilege that this position allowed me to gather the data which I wanted to obtain. I knew the participants before the study had begun, and due to the fact that I already knew the women a mutual understanding of culture and history existed among us. My participants knew me and I knew them, and because of our relationships a deeper and connected discourse existed in our conversations. Consequently, the depth of information shared

between us allowed me, as researcher, a certain position of privilege to the experiences which form the basis of our stories. I selected my participants purposefully in order to be able to uncover, through expression of our stories, the full range of types of discourse which I experience when we have conversations. Lincoln and Guba (1985) express the importance of selecting participants by purposive sampling:

Purposive sampling...increases the scope or range of data exposed (random or representative sampling is likely to suppress more deviant cases) as well as the likelihood that the full array of multiple realities will be uncovered; and because purposive sampling can be pursued in ways that maximize the investigator's ability to devise grounded theory that takes adequate account of local conditions, local mutual shapings, and local values. (p. 40)

The inclusion of myself as a participant as well as researcher in the study can be accounted for in two ways. First, I am part of the knowledge base which I have researched because I am a Metis woman. I am not separate or apart from the experiences which form the basis of the stories. Also, in the conversation process, as the method to collect the data, I could not be an observer or distant because I would then not be a part of the circle, and the conversation would not flow. In fact, if I distanced myself, the entire essence of the conversations would have been affected, and it is in the natural form of conversing that I wanted to base the collection of the data for this study. If I removed myself by distancing myself, the conversations would no longer be natural.

With respect to the maintenance of trust from me towards the other

participants in the study, I distributed a consent form after I had discussed the ethical guidelines and requirements which were honoured during the course of the study. The ethical standards, which have been established by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, have been adopted by the University of Saskatchewan and guide the practise of research on this campus. Specifically, I explained the following guidelines to my participants:

1. The participants would not be identified individually.
2. Participation was voluntary, and participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time.
3. I would treat all information confidentially.
4. I would release the raw data to each participant after transcription of the conversations had taken place. At that time, the participant would review the data and then formally release the right for me to use the data for the purposes of the study.
5. All data would be destroyed after the University of Saskatchewan formally accepted the completed thesis document.

A blank copy of the Agreement and Consent Form, which I created specifically for this research study, is attached as Appendix A. Appendix B contains the Data Release Form which I distributed to the participants when I asked them to review the transcripts, to edit accordingly, and to release the data for my use. A blank copy of Appendix B is also attached.

Once the participants were contacted, and the Agreement and Consent

Forms (Appendix A) were signed, I established meeting times for our conversations. I arranged to meet for two conversations of approximately 1.5 to 2.0 hours per participant. I audio taped our conversations, and I took field notes immediately after each session. I used the audio tape in order to not disrupt the process of conversation by writing at the same time that we were talking. The purpose of field notes was to improve the credibility of the data obtained from the conversations.

The field notebook is the primary recording tool of the qualitative researcher. It becomes filled with descriptions of people, places, events, activities, and conversations; and it becomes a place for ideas, reflections, hunches, and notes about patterns that seem to be emerging. (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 45)

After the conversations had taken place, they were transcribed and I proceeded to distribute paper copies to the participants. I asked them to read the documents and to edit them according to the directions contained on the Consent Release Form (Appendix B). I then asked the participants to return the signed consent form and their paper copy of our conversations for my further use for the study.

After release was obtained from the participants, I included their conditions of release, and then I began to read and reread the data. I read the entire data four times. At this point, I began to code the data into the themes which emerged during the conversations by using the constant comparative method as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985). This method provides a framework to consider when processing data into 'chunks of meaning'. These

chunks of meaning are identified in chapters 4, 5 and 6 as the themes which emerged from the data.

In describing narrative, Mishler (cited in Polkinghorne, 1988) suggests that two notions about story can be explored. First, the story is a claim of self-identity and second, the expressions contained in the story function to uphold the validity of this identity. As well, Mishler holds that the analysis of narratives provides the human sciences with a means for a more appropriate theory construction, one that incorporates an understanding of complex relationships that change through time. He states:

...in narrative analysis the story contains a sequence of socially meaningful acts without which it would not be a story; its analysis therefore provides the basis for a direct interpretation of a complex unit of social interaction, in comparison to the standard approach where such inferences are based on decontextualized bits and pieces of information. (p. 166)

To describe the themes which emerged from the stories of the four Metis women participants in the study, a narrative stance was required. The narrative stance provided the opportunity for the researcher to fully participate in the qualitative research process by focusing on a goal. Richardson (1990) defined a narrative stance as the selection of a typology which defines the finding of something in the data which is noteworthy and able to be classified. The narrative stance of this research project, the defined typology, is the description of the stories collected in the data by themes as collective narratives.

The collective narratives represent my narrative analysis or narrative reasoning, as a Metis woman. I did not analyse particular aspects of the

stories and Jerome Bruner (1986) discusses the characteristics which determine two modes of narrative inquiry.

One mode, the paradigmatic or logico-scientific one, attempts to fulfill the ideal of a formal, mathematical system of description and explanation. It employs categorization or conceptualization and the operations by which categories are established, instantiated, idealized, and related one to the other to form a system. ...

We know a very great deal about the paradigmatic mode of thinking, and there have been developed over the millennia powerful prosthetic devices for helping us carry on with its work: logic, mathematics, sciences, and automata for operating in these fields as painlessly and swiftly as possible. ... [The second mode], paradigmatic "imaginization" (or intuition) is not the same as the imagination of the novelist or poet. Rather, it is the ability to see possible formal connections before one is able to prove them in any formal way.

The imaginative application of the narrative mode leads instead to good stories, gripping drama, believable historical accounts. It deals in human or human-like intention and action and the vicissitudes and consequences that mark their course. It strives to put its timeless miracles into the particulars of experience, and to locate the experience in time and place. (pp. 12-13)

In keeping with my study, I did not intend to analyse particular aspects of our stories by using paradigmatic logico-scientific processes. Rather, I intended to collect and present our stories as I understand them in a paradigmatic "imaginative" and synthesized way.

Once I had decided upon the themes, or chunks of meaning which I discovered from the stories, I created three themes from the entire body of data which I had collected. After realizing that I could not use all of the stories, I edited the themes by removing stories which were similar in nature. At this point, I had a series of stories for each theme which I then wrote as three

collective narratives. The presentation of the stories by theme in the form of collective narratives allowed me the opportunity to best describe how I understand our stories. Since I do not view or understand our stories as separate and apart from each other, writing the themes as collective narratives gave me the opportunity to best describe my research report from my own perspective as a Metis woman. "Like formal science research, descriptive narrative research involves detection, selection, and interpretation of the data, which in narrative is the text of the story and the common cultural presuppositions necessary for understanding it" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 169).

According to Polkinghorne (1988), detection, selection and interpretation of the data is involved in descriptive narrative research practises. In this research study, detection and selection of the stories contained in the data are presented by themes in the form of three collective narratives. The interpretation of the data has been presented in the form of a reflection. This reflection is provided in chapters 4, 5 and 6 and immediately follows each collective narrative which is contained in each chapter. The reflection is my attempt to describe how I make meaning and gain knowledge from the stories. The reflection allows the opportunity to interpret the meanings behind the stories and to discuss the ideas as a form of knowledge. Since the reflections are personal, they are a description of my own understanding of the meanings presented in the stories. However, as a Metis woman I offer the reflections as a description of the way I make meaning and search for knowledge.

Since the reflections presented after the collective narratives are my own, I claim them to be only my understandings of the knowledge presented in the stories which I collected for the purposes of this study. My reflection is the written description of how I understand the knowledge which is contained within the collective narratives. In Mishler (1986), Halliday defines three analytical functions when attempting to arrive at an understanding of meaning of a story. Of these three analytical functions, "the ideational or referential meaning of what is said" (Mishler, 1986, p. 77) is an example of an attempt to describe knowledge based on shared cultural meanings. Mishler explains:

My own view is that the use of cultural understandings is unavoidable and that analyses of naturally occurring discourse, such as interview [conversation] narratives, require that the investigator "add to" or supplement the text through a step that Labor and Fanshel (1977, p. 49) refer to as "expansion". In this process the analyst brings "together all the information that we have that will help in understanding the production, interpretation, and sequencing of the utterance and question. To accomplish this expansion of meaning, the analyst uses her or his "best understanding", makes explicit pronominal or elliptical references to other material as well as to presumably shared knowledge between the participants, and introduces factual material from other parts of the interview [conversation] or from general knowledge of the world. (p. 95)

My reflection is the written description of how I understand the meaning and knowledge contained in the collective narratives. As Mishler articulates, my analysis of the discourse used in this study is presented from my perspective as a cultural insider. Also, I present the reflections as an expression of the "expansion" of the stories by describing what they mean to me.

Once I had finished the data collection, the writing of the collective

narratives and the reflections, I began the process of writing the thesis document. This writing process has been, at times, very difficult. With the support, probing, and guidance of my committee members, I have created this thesis document through the writing process. This document is the written presentation of the stories of four Metis women by themes in the form of collective narratives. As well, it represents my attempt to reflect on the themes, as a Metis woman, as an example of how I interpret and make meaning out of the stories in order to gain knowledge.

CHAPTER FOUR

BEING A METIS WOMAN: IDENTITY

Description in the Form of Collective Narratives and Reflection on Our Stories

The following three chapters present a selection of stories chosen from the data obtained during the conversations with the four Metis women participants in the study. The selected stories are presented by theme in the form of collective narratives. The three themes, each written as a collective narrative, are described as identity (Chapter Four), family (Chapter Five), and soul murder (Chapter Six). After each theme in each chapter, I reflect on the stories which are presented in the form of a collective narrative.

The stories which are used in each theme and written in the form of collective narratives, are stories of the participants. The stories relate to each other in terms of identity, family, and soul murder, and describe our lives as Metis women. The stories themselves have not been changed in order to create a grammatically or academically correct document. The authenticity of our voice is maintained when the stories are written as they were spoken. They were, however, fused together as I understand them in this way, in the form of collective narratives. The collective narratives represent a way to describe how our stories relate to each other, build on each other over time,

and always create a sense of a beginning from another situation and a sense of ending in anticipation for a future event. Our lives are like our stories, they are forever evolving and informing us.

My reflection on the stories represents my own description of how I understand the meaning and knowledge which is contained in the text. These reflections are my own thoughts as a Metis woman, but they have often been supported by the voice of other Metis women in the context of our conversations. My reflections follow each of the collective narratives and are an example of how I make meaning and gain knowledge from our stories. My reflections are presented in italicized and indented form directly following the text of the collective narratives of identity, family and soul murder.

Books package words, not experiences. These stories, in a language [by Metis women] are words that take the reader through my experiences and through those of the [Metis women] as I have come to understand them. They describe the experiences but they do not materialize them. Only the reader can make that connection. They do not give you the smell of poplar smoke, the taste of moose meat, the sound of [Metis women] voices laughing. Words do not give you the squeak of very cold snow underfoot. They do not give you the sound of a distant river on a summer solstice night.

Words are like dreams. They reflect experiences and they also inform it. Like words, dreams do not materialize experience. Only the dreamer is capable of that transformation. You are the reader. You are the dreamer. You have the power of materialization, the power of understanding. Take these words and dream into them. They will take you to a place that is real. (Ridington, 1990, p. 259)

Identity

Understanding the concept of identity can be difficult and perplexing to some people. As a Metis woman, understanding who I am in this world in terms of how I identify myself has been a journey which is not complete. Based on the mixed blood nature of being a Metis woman, there is a constant interplay between cultures and views of the world. Consequently, understanding identity has many twists and turns. The following stories describe and identify some of these complexities. As well, the stories describe the coming to terms with being a Metis woman.

Being a Metis Woman: Identity - The Collective Narrative

You want me to start how I began? All right. My father was Metis. His mother was coming from a reserve. And his father, I am not sure where he came from, probably Quebec, and down to Red River, and then finally they settled in Saskatchewan. Now, they come from a town in Saskatchewan. They had 21 children (laughter). Three wives, one dad. My dad was from the second wife and was the last kid. Because of so many children, they worked on the road allowance, all the kids would come along. On one of their travels they went to a town in Saskatchewan. This was where my mother was from, non-Aboriginal and where she grew up. At that point in time, sometimes the farmers would say, I'll take your boy and bring him up. These road allowance kids worked as hard labour on the farm. So this is what happened with my

father. He got left on one of the farms. That's where he stayed. But, they always allowed him to go home and visit. He was quite lucky because the farmer that took him in only had one son, same age. So they grew up as brothers. But they also allowed my father to go back home. So, he still could keep most of his language, his culture. He was always allowed to go back. A lot of kids were not allowed to go back at all. So, they lost their language and culture. He spoke Cree, yeah, that's where it all started. He met my mom there. She is German.

Then, they had five children. And I was the baby. Now, among all the children, I look non-native, invisible minority. With that came certain pros and cons because I got away with more than my sister that looked Indian. There were things she wouldn't get away with. But there were pros on this side too. Oh, they finally moved into Saskatoon. They lived in what we used to call the halfbreed area. We weren't called Indians. We were called halfbreeds.

Halfbreed. So, when they came to Saskatoon, I was the only one born here. I was born eleven years away from my next brother. I was kind of his, my dad's, second family. And in the summer they would send me to my white grandfather, or the next summer they sent me to my kookum, to her community. I was the only one of the five kids that got my father's language. But when I would come home after spending the summer, well they had this other little family. I wanted to speak Cree to my grandfather. That was a no no because they would never allow you to. You would not speak Cree, so I lost it,

my first language.

Well, my father, as I said, spoke Cree. He spoke Michif. He spoke French and he spoke German. But he never went to school. He was never allowed to go to school. The other boy that he grew up with, the farmer's son, went off to school. And my father had to stay and do the chores. So, he was not allowed to go. There wasn't a choice. He never went to school at all. And yet he had all this rich background, the story telling. And now with the academic, I know that the story telling was the best. When I was growing up, you always looked at mom and said is it true? That story true? (laughter)

You know, sometimes they made it up a little bit. So, it was more interesting when dad told the story. But she said most of it, the base of the story was true. Some of these stories were so farfetched that if we read them nowadays, it would be fiction. Then my mom said she didn't believe it either because she was brought up in a different way until she lived in a halfbreed community and things happened (laughter).

My one grandfather spoke Cree, Soto, Michif, French and English, and yet he was barely literate. I think he had grade two or three. And I think one of the things that happened in my family was that it seems that generation really lost respect or had a lot of bad experiences for being Indian or to admit that you are part Indian. I am darker than some of my family, I mean, I have uncles and cousins who look full blood, and that's a common thing being in a halfbreed family. Some people really carry the dark. Some really carry the fair. And yet

it's really hard for some people to understand that that creates a real different life for you. And then you lose language the way we did in my family because there was real pressure to speak English, and I think even more so at that time.

Of course, my sister, she always pretended that she wasn't Indian (laughter). She didn't want to look Indian. She wanted to look like me who didn't look Indian. And, of course, I wanted to be Indian, but look white. Who ever decided what we look like made that choice with a reason. I still think Indian. She still thinks white. She brought her children up thinking white.

There is a struggle being fair and having only a few Native characteristics, like straight eyelashes. It is incredible, so but, um, it is also interesting that I spend so much time in my life, and I don't know why, maybe I will later on, but when I was younger I find that it was like, okay, you are part Indian and you are part white. That was kind of all it was, the short and the long of it. That was it. But, it seems in the last five, no, the last ten years of my life, I am thirty-seven now, since my late twenties, it is not so much that I can't say, yes, that I am part Indian and I am part white, but it is more like, what the hell does that mean? Like, what does it mean to be Metis because you are right about the place or role of Native people. You can't totally deny any knowledge, any position, any acquaintance with Native people, and then the same goes like in my family there was the French. The thing is that those people are very hard working and, you know, in some ways narrow minded and stuff like that (laughter), but in every group of people, people have their own

nuances and personalities. From a historical perspective and history I try to reconcile those people because inside of me, I try to create me and recognize that at some level I cannot abandon that even though some of my forefathers may have done some terrible things to Native people. It has been a real struggle, and you know, sometimes I just want to get out. I just do not want to do this anymore. I don't want to care about this anymore, and then I get thrown back into it. Sometimes, you know, I'll hear a racist comment and, wha. It takes almost nothing, eh, and then you are in there like a dirty shirt defending (laughter).

Do I believe that being Metis is something unique, do I believe that being female is something unique? I thought a lot about it, and I thought maybe I am not the best person. Maybe you should find another person you know, because in some ways I am disconnected. Maybe you should talk to my friend. Even though she is treaty, she is really Metis because her mother is Cree and her father is German. I thought about what it is exactly that I am saying, and I sort of came around on this big long journey. And I wonder whether I have anything to contribute. I thought to myself, I think that I have thought about it so much in the last five years that I do not even know where to begin identifying it now. You know, about being Metis there was a point in which I had not even thought about it at all. If you were to ask me the question I would have no answer. Now I feel that I have thought about it so much that I realize that there isn't really an answer. I do not know what I can say except that I have an interest in

the past, you know. When I grew up I had my father who was British and my mother was Metis and both sets of grandparents. My maternal grandfather died early, so my grandmother on my mom's side and my grandparents on my dad's side lived with us for some time. So, I remember having all this time with these people and all of the care and all of the attention and all of the common sense. So, I really had a lot of time and a lot of space with my grandparents. Now I am really regretting why was I not listening better, you know, why wasn't I paying attention because there were so many stories. So many things and, you know, how women talk, they are more anecdotal.

One thing I think I learned from my grandmother was how to make bread, how to use flour, how to make biscuits, bannock and bread cookies. I remember always baking things. I remember a good bread maker always has as clean a pan when she is finished as when she begins. And so, that's kind of like as a teacher and as an academic now, what value do I find in how to make bread? But it wasn't just the baking of the bread. It was the whole act of why you bake it. There is nothing more pleasing than feeding your family. The aroma in your house just stays. There is a part of being female in the house, having the ability to know how to keep a house, you can see the value in it. And the day we had fry bread I used to laugh when my kids and I went over there and have fry bread. I remember those times and my mother-in-law too.

I learned a lot from her as well. She is, uh, treaty from a band, and I remember watching her bake bread. All the different techniques she had. I

don't know why baking bread is so, to me, synonymous with the responsibility of womanhood but, yeah. And there were no long conversations if there was a dilemma. There was always people to listen but little advice. Always, forever listening. The right thing was always this moving object. There was never one right way to be. We would go some place and I would notice someone do something different. Why did you do it that way? You know, I didn't do it like that. Well, there is more than one way to skin a cat (laughter). What an ugly little saying. But never a sense that this is the way it ought to be. The way it ought to be was something for you to know.

As children, we were only ourselves, eh. We have never had big long discussions about what it means to be Metis and that there is Metis in our family or Native and just, never, oh he is Native and she is not Native. We just grew up around people you know from both cultures and I never had discussions about who is what. I really try not to have those, you know. People say it is important for my son or daughter to understand their Nativeness. You know, I think no, it is really important for them to understand themselves and their families. They need to know something about where their grandmother was from, who their family was and how to treat your grandma with respect, and it is not so important to know that she was Cree or Soto. So, there is still a contradiction, you know.

In the last year or so, and because mostly I have gone into teaching in Adult Ed and working with Metis women, I find that people really have a lot of

questions around what it means to be Metis. Some people tend to be very traditional and see their Metisness as being very Native, um, so I think you know that there are a lot of people, like me, who are very fair skinned. I always describe us as travelling around like spies, you know, people never suspect that you have this sort of group that you identify with. When I went to this presentation on the writings of Douglas Cardinal and, um, he talked a lot about what it meant to be Metis. We got into a long conversation, and one of the things I find is that I spent every day trying to bring resolution to the conflict between my Metis grandmother and on the other side my British grandmother. If you go through Indian history, First Nations history, Metis history you see those British were real awful, you know, and then there is my sweet little innocent grandmother standing there, you know, four foot seven. And I thought, uh, where do I stand in this whole thing? So, uh, boy did I carry her around on my shoulders for a long time to try and bring some kind of respect to who I was and to this woman. This one woman who was so much from the land and this other woman who was so much from the world and so much from another part of the world. Born in London, she was feisty and energetic, you know, ambitious and proud and independent. Then I had this other grandmother who was silent, and you know, we would go for long walks in the fields with the birds and just a real mainstay. A real solid person, nothing exciting had to happen. Nothing, it was just family.

I remember my mom telling me stories of how when all of her brothers,

there was eleven on her side and my grandfather had died when my mom was four, and my grandmother had all of these children. You know, she talks about when they all went off to war. So many of my uncles went off to war and how every Sunday her and my grandmother would make up these little parcels. Eight little parcels and send them off to my uncles. And my grandmother would knit things, make them socks, bake them little things, you know, sugary things and how every Sunday her and my mom would put together these little parcels and send them off. I listen to stories about the family and nothing terribly exciting happened yet as I read, I think, wha, no wonder nothing exciting happened there was like eight kids, like eleven kids in all (laughter). So, I feel like I have spent a lot of time thinking about who I am and where I came from, you know. It is funny because everybody seems less bothered about it, and I think, you know, that part of the irony is that my father and my British grandmother are most fond of my mother and, you know, my Metis grandmother.

Maybe I am just thinking about all of this now because this is a political agenda on the table. Somehow, my Metisness or what it means to be Metis is an issue because the people make it that. Or, because of where I work it is an issue or because, um, the kind of work I do forces me to take a stand on one side or the other. I don't know, I don't know where the driving force is coming from. Definition, from personal definition of who I am as a Metis woman and I have these students, you know, and I respect them. It seems to them irrelevant

because they are who they are and they have been where they have been and their history is what it is. And they don't have to explain that to anyone for anything. Not even me. I remember one of my students, she was very adamant and somewhat immature in her thinking, but yet not immature at all, just more in her own articulation of her ideas. She said I hate that when people want to say who Metis people are. I have this as my background, and this has been my experience and I am none of those other people. I am only me. And I respect her for her stand, and here I am saying no, no, no, trace your blood lines. Here, this is very important (laughter).

When I think of the term halfbreed and Metis, you know, we call ourselves halfbreeds. And this woman who is a counsellor, when I am seeing her and when I call myself a halfbreed, her body language physically changed (laughter). It is interesting. She said to me, why do you call yourself a halfbreed? I said, what do you mean, like a fuckin' halfbreed? (laughter) She said, oh, yeah, and her body language went like, yeah. I said, you don't have to be worried about that. This is what we call ourselves. To you it may seem derogatory or a put down, but to me it is not. Then I sort of explained to her I said from my mom's side she is French and Iroquois. My grandfather from down east was part Iroquois and French from there. That's my mom's father. And, my dad's side, my one grandmother was Sioux. And my other grandmother was Cree, a full blooded Cree woman. And my other grandmother was French, and my other grandmother was Ojibway/Chippewa. So, if somebody

asked who I am, well, am I supposed to say that I am Cree, Sioux, Iroquois, Ojibwa/Chippewa and French (laughter). In terms of blood I am a mixture of Indian and white. So I call myself a halfbreed. That's easy. The truth is that people want things black and white. All they want to know is whether you are Indian or not an Indian. It's kind of like dogs, you know. In my family, my dad used to say that mutts like that, mixed breed dogs, make the best dogs. They are good personality dogs.

But I see always what I have gotten from each side. From my father and from his mother, there is such a sense of the importance of doing things well. If it's worth doing, it's worth doing well. If you are not going to do it well, then leave it for someone else. Um, that precision and articulateness, the ability to focus and be disciplined and appearance, and, you know, cleanliness and order and all of this. I see so much coming out of my father, and he was a very disciplined man. He worked very hard. A very self sacrificing man for certain ideas and values. And then I have on this other side, sort of what I call my warm spirit. I don't know, it was the part of me that was allowed to run around without my shoes. To get filthy dirty. To go out in the bush for hours and the part of me that never had any cares. My grandmother would say, I know you will do the right thing. And, you know, this heavy moral responsibility about issues like should I throw the bug away or shouldn't I? (laughter) So, I know you will do the right thing. So, there was a real contrast, you know. My mother, she would set aside everything for company and for people. If there

was something interesting going on in the family, then we just left and we left everything. We left and I am sure this made my father absolutely crazy over the years (laughter), but there was that sense of priority. Being outdoors was about being peaceful, quiet, not shouting or arguing or getting drunk. Just being together. So, I think part of who I am includes a combination of both and part of me moves not terribly uncomfortably in either way for spaces in time. But, at some point I am always torn between those two ways because at times they are quite contrary. It is probably for me the dilemma when you talk about putting together or synthesizing two different nationalities or nation states. It is hard to come to terms with that.

Then there is the government in this big game of divide and conquer between Indian people. I think that's the different status, non-status, treaty, Metis, the Inuit from the North. I think it's all a game. You keep those Indian communities divided, because if they get together, look out. Yeah, because there is the power.

That's way, I forget which Indian chief it was, but they wanted Indian land in Canada, not their reserves. They wanted Indian land from B.C. to the east coast. And they wanted that land to stay Indian, and when they started doing this, the government starved them. They had no choice but to go on the reserves. Now, if they would have all that land they would have something to live on. It's crazy and it's not changing. They wanted the Indians to become farmers. So some of these Indians became very good farmers. They started

taking their goods to town, and they were profiting. And the reserves were becoming rich farming reserves, and all of a sudden the permit system was in. They were controlled. The Indian agent wouldn't let them off the reserves. So, they couldn't sell their goods. So, it is another control, a different type of control. And that's divide and conquer. So, it's not just the white against the Indians, it's Indians against Indians.

I married in 1973 and I had a Metis card. And the minute the Metis organization found out that I married a treaty, and it was before 1985, I gained treaty rights, they came and said, you are not Metis any longer. You are now a treaty Indian (laughter). I don't know, just because you are given a different number, it doesn't mean you are not a Metis woman anymore. I am still a Metis woman and always will be. A Metis with a treaty number.

And along with that came a lot of pros and cons. In myself I wanted an education and being a Metis, we couldn't afford it. People didn't pay for our education when I was growing up. So, if your parents didn't have the money, you didn't go to school. So that's what happened.

When I first married my husband, I felt very uncomfortable about going to school because a lot of Indian people would actually say, sure, the only reason you married a treaty is because you want to have your education paid for. You want your children to have the treaty rights. So, it was not until 1989, after I had been married for 16 years and I had been actually pushed going back to school and using the treaty rights to get me through school.

When I married my husband and I went to the reserve for the first time, there was this little white girl right here, showing up on this Indian reservation with this Indian man. Nobody wants you. You don't belong. And then when I showed up on my side of the family, of course, they didn't like the Indian. I don't know for some reason, Metis and Indian, not so much now, but during the 70's, did not get along. So, I never fit anywhere. So that was when I left home.

And you got to the point where, I am afraid of, not afraid, but ashamed, ashamed of my own culture, you know, my heritage. I was ashamed of that. It was really weird. I have to tell you this, this one story. I never denied being a Metis. Never ever denied being halfbreed. I knew who I was and what I was. I remember one time we were sitting around talking. And it was his family, of course, they were going on and on about how much French they had in their Indian, you know, in their blood, like oh, this much French here, you know, this much French from this person and that person. And a little bit Indian from over here. That kind of thing, you know, really ridiculous. And I sat there with this whole bunch of people, and then they were going on, oh well, what about you? I said, well, my grandfather was a Scotsman. What can I say? (laughter) My great great grandfather was a Scotsman. Grandpa is part French. And there is a lot of Englishman stuff with the family. I said that my great grandpa, his Mom, was a full blooded Cree, you know. He married a full blooded Cree. My great grandpa, so he was a halfbreed, you know. And I said my grandmother,

she was the same thing. She was a halfbreed. Her mother was a full blooded Cree, you know. So there was a lot of Scots because that was the community they came from. That's the area they came from. So, I said, you got a lot of red hair, blue eyes, green eyed, you know, black hair, blue eyes, a whole mixture. Then, they were going on and on. They said, yeah, we must have more French blood than you. And that is not funny. They said we treaty Indians have more French blood than you. And I said, yeah, you are ashamed of being treaty Indians. I am not ashamed of being a halfbreed. Oh, no, no, no, that's not the point. And then, I said, what's the point of saying that you got that much French blood if you are not going to admit who the hell was an Indian in your family? Somebody must be an Indian or you wouldn't be who you are. Things like that kind of popped out when I was not expected to say nothing. You know, it became so that all of a sudden they were trying to prove that they were just as good halfbreeds as I was, but that I would never be as good an Indian as they were because I wasn't treaty.

I wasn't tall enough, like even my own body wasn't acceptable. I was compared. Here I am, a halfbreed. I got brown eyes, high cheek bones and auburn hair. This is who I am. I wasn't a California girl. I am a far way away from a California girl. I am a bush Indian half, like my other family members, they were bush Indians. How can you be something that you are not?

But I married my treaty. I married the treaty number, and basically it didn't really matter that much because I didn't really use it. I deliberately put off

school because I didn't want anybody to say that she married a treaty so that she could go to school, you know. I figure I had to earn my way through all those things, you know. It was really strange that all of a sudden I would be ashamed of where I came from. I came from a family, you know, there were no great statesmen, or politicians, or whatever. But they were good, solid people. They did what they could with what they had. You certainly have pretty strange characters in there but, you know, there wasn't any murderers or whatever (laughter).

They were just people with their little idiosyncracies whatever, you know. But I don't think that people deliberately went out and tried to step on somebody to get their own way. I don't know about this generation because I don't know them all, but there was nothing to be ashamed of. They didn't depend on anybody else because they couldn't depend on anybody else except themselves and their families.

The Metis people, like we don't have the rights, the treaty rights, the relationship with the government. So we were always independent. We were poor as hell. Oh, goodness, we were poor. But you know, we just survived. There is no kind of status in that. But, there is also no shame in it. I think we never really fit in, kind of. Metis people had to make their own culture. You are not an Indian. You don't have a treaty number. And that stigma really does, I think, apply. Despite this our families grew up halfbreed, they grew up in those Metis settlements, and you have a different way of looking at things. You just

do.

I remember when we started this dancing. We were all halfbreed and we really fit together well because we simply were basically the same people. Because you had to learn to laugh at everything. I heard it's no shame to be poor. I have never done anything wrong in my life except being poor. There is no crime being poor, otherwise I would be in jail right now which is true (laughter).

I have got nothing to be ashamed of, you know, people often say, dirty halfbreeds. They never knew my mom. You couldn't walk into the house because she would be washing your face whether it was dirty or not (laughter). Yeah, there was one thing, I always hated to be called a dirty halfbreed because there was no such thing as far as I was concerned being a dirty halfbreed. When I got married, it became the real thing because they said this or that family right there, they are nothing but dirty halfbreeds. I wasn't even related to these people yet, how could they do that? Maybe because you were given the house on the reserve and you don't have to pay for it. And these people build a house a little at a time. It became a real thing with me, honest to God, I was the cleanest woman on the reserve because I had to be (laughter). Nobody calls me a dirty halfbreed.

We were called dirty halfbreeds and I have to say, you know, my mom used to tell us all these things about keeping clean. This is the truth, boy, we never went out of the house without clean underwear (laughter). She would

say are your underwear clean? And then when we grew older, we wore brasiers and stuff, she said are your underwear clean? Is your brasier clean? Is it a clean one? And, of course, we all got embarrassed because we were just young women (laughter). And we would say, oh, mom, don't say that! And she would say, no, we don't have any money, but we are clean. We were clean. My mom used to say it doesn't cost nothing but soap and water. You keep yourself clean. And I think, you know, she was right, it doesn't cost a whole lot to buy a big bottle of cheap soap and keep yourself clean.

My mom always said work on those bacteria (laughter). Especially on Saturday morning, get up out of bed (laughter)! I remember, I remember that all these things that I grew up with, you know. And it is really funny because I find myself saying those same things either to myself or to my daughter - you crazy broad, pick up your stuff! Hard work never kills anybody (laughter). I am beginning to sound like my mother, it is really weird. And you ask yourself, why would you be any different, you know. Who are you supposed to be like?

I think that, I think that if we were able to get all people from Indian ancestry, get them all together, and say, well, we are being used as pawns. We are being used as, you know, as long as the government has us fighting amongst each other then we don't have the energy to fight them. We don't have any energy to come together as a group. I think the government is doing that purposely. I really do. I think that the government is kind of like giving a little scrap to a group of starving people like animals. Those animals will fight

for that scrap. And that is exactly what the government is doing. They are giving some to haves and some are have nots. And so people of Indian ancestry are fighting amongst each other. I see that so much. It's all divide and conquer. I think that, I am hoping anyway that our communities will grow up to see this some day.

As a First Nations person, like me, it is not an issue of getting something for that. For me it is an issue of my heritage. So, for me it is not an issue of getting something for being Metis, it is an issue of being able to claim my heritage. And I have that right as a person to claim my heritage. To be able to say this is who I am, and now let's get on with it. Let's relate our voice. I need to say, hey, this is who I am and, no, I don't want anything from it, you know. It's not because I want an affirmative action position, it's not because I want a tax exemption. It's because this is who I am. And, you know, it forced me into being a phoney all my life because I think that's part of the identity struggle. Sometimes you have to become phoney with yourself. You have to choose to be in the white community or the Indian community. But at some levels, you know that you are being phoney to yourself. And that hurts. Yeah, it breaks your spirit because you can't be you. But, they would like you if you were somebody else.

Being a Metis Woman: Identity - My Reflection

As a Metis, halfbreed, or mixed blood person, my search for identity has been a lifelong issue mostly because of rapid change and complex diversity contained in my family history. My family and community is made up of people from many different places and from many different backgrounds. In my lifetime, there was often a need for us to move around in order to survive. This seems to have been the reality for previous generations as well. This forced movement began in its most oppressive form when my family was dispersed by the government from their Metis community in Manitoba during the 1870's. In one sense, this created a sense of loss for me because the fabric of my community was unravelled by this change. With community dispersement comes a change to the family unit, cultural events and the use of our languages. The stories in my family describe this loss and separation of my people. So, we did what we had to do in order to survive, and for many of us this meant that we had to adopt to mainstream ways of living because we had no other choice. However, this forced adaptation does not preclude association with our ancestors, and this is why many of us, who are mixed blood people, are able to walk in many worlds.

Some of us call ourselves halfbreeds. I have called myself a halfbreed because of my mixed blood heritage. I have the scrip documents from my family when they were dispersed from Red River, and those documents are called North-West Halfbreed Claims Commission forms otherwise known as scrip application forms. I really do consider myself a mixed blood person, a halfbreed because the term Metis is somewhat a political term. I think that political voice and association is important in order for us to collectively discuss our issues and concerns, but my reluctance to use it is based in the designation that it offers to me. I do not like the government labelling me and determining my status as a result of these labels. This is my experience with labels, and for the most part I view the label as another example and product of the process of colonization. I say this because we have not been able to form in completeness as a community of Metis people, and I think that my community has been prevented from forming because of the practices and policies of the government(s) towards us.

An example of the prevention of the creation of a strong community is contained in the stories of language loss and how it became more and more difficult to speak our native languages

because of forced integration into mainstream culture. I think that the use of native languages on reserves or in the very few Metis communities that survived as communities occurred because the people were restricted geographically. This restriction gave the people in the community the opportunity to continue to use the language. For me and my family, because of being dispersed, we lost this community opportunity, and consequently we lost the language. I can remember my grandfather speaking Cree, Soto, Michif and French to me. The use of these languages diminished, and they were spoken only in the context of the home. Since the languages were not an integral part of society or respected as central to the fabric of our family, we had to speak English in order to survive in mainstream society. For myself, this loss of language has created a feeling or sense of loss of part of me as a person. And this does affect how I have developed my identity as a mixed blood person. In my own family, my great grandmother spoke only Cree, so my grandfather, her son, spoke Cree as well as four other languages. My father, her grandson, had to go to school in mainstream society, and he was forced to speak English. So in many ways the preservation of language and cultural practices could only be maintained in an underground way for Indian people on reserves or the few intact Metis communities

which I mentioned above. I am sure that my grandfather and my father did not consider what the impact of the loss of our family language would be for me and my generation because they were just too busy surviving. The impact for me and many mixed blood people like me is that we have in certain ways lost the opportunity to identify with and to practice our heritage because of this loss of language. It is my responsibility now to learn the language however I can. This loss of language is a result of the process of colonization and the dispersement of my family from their community.

From the stories in our community, it was not uncommon for our grandparents to speak four or five languages. My grandfather spoke five languages, but his schooling was minimal. Some people never had the opportunity to go to school at all. With little or no formal schooling, the implications for my family was a predisposition to poverty. Without an education, the labour related, unstable, low paying jobs were the only ones available to my grandfather and then to my parents. Without an education and without any special rights to education, getting a post secondary education for people in my family was impossible. Now I am a very educated person in my family. In fact, I am the most

educated person in my family, and my level of education is unheard of throughout my entire family. Since we are such a large family, this is quite a revealing situation. And it is not just the opportunity for the experience of education at higher levels, but what that education provides is also extremely foreign to me. When you come from a family, and from a community, where there are no professional people or even few people with a grade 12, then it is like walking into and living in a world from another planet. I often think of what it would be like for a middle or high class person to live in poverty with no education. I wonder what it would be like for a mainstream person to be forced to live with the ideas that support another way of seeing the world and to be expected to flourish in a different language and different environment than their birth family. This is a reverse scenario, I know, but I think that there would be many difficulties for that person. For those of us who are working towards a higher education, coming from our poor families, we often do so with a tremendous cost. We encounter situations that are totally foreign to us in terms of the way that we see the world and we must, as Metis people, financially pay for our own education. The practises and protocols which support mainstream culture and their ideas seem so natural for mainstream people, and I can only suppose

this to be because mainstream culture espouses their way of seeing the world. As a mixed blood woman, I am constantly challenged to adapt to this environment.

One of the ways that we adapt is to maintain our stories because they represent our view of the world. We were often told culturally coded stories. These stories existed for various reasons. In one sense the stories were used in order to pass on secret types of information. If the stories ended up in the wrong community or in the wrong hands of another group, the real message was not known to them. As well, culturally coded stories were also told to relay history and particularly to maintain our history. There are stories in my family which have not been recorded in the history books and they are, at times, radical departures from what you may read in those history texts about a certain event or situation. In my own family there are stories about my great grandfather and his long relationship and association with Sitting Bull and the Sioux people. For political and legal reasons these stories are maintained within my family. So the stories become culturally coded so that we don't lose our history. It is kind of interesting being a Metis person reading history books about your family or ancestors. I have experienced reading about one situation or

event, and then I have this other history which is recreated in my head by my family stories. It is an interesting position to be in.

Stories were also told for pure entertainment. The stories were sometimes meant to make you laugh or to make you hear about something really embarrassing or foolish that someone did.

Contained in the story was a message, and I learned at a young age to incorporate the story as part of my learning about life. I suppose this is why I continue to be infatuated and drawn to the stories in my family and other stories about Metis people in general. Stories were also told about revenge towards other people. This is kind of like the trickster figure who in the process of every story is faced with the consequence of his behaviour.

Scary stories and stories of spirits, the supernatural and of people who returned from the dead are also told. These stories are real to us, and we do not consider them to be just fiction.

Strongly embedded in our stories is the message of how we see the world and how we learn to function within that world. One of the messages involves knowing your place in the world. Some of the stories discuss how the issue of what you look like creates a real difference in your life. I have watched family members being

treated in certain ways because of how they look. I have seen a correlation between darkness of skin and despair in life. I had this uncle who was very dark, and he committed suicide. I have heard other family stories about this same thing and I have to wonder about this. The way people are treated socially is different depending on what you look like. With this notion in mind, I am always very cautious to speak only about my experience and not the experience of others.

It has been painful to watch while people in my family have been treated differently because of what they look like. I have watched the fair people treated badly by the dark people, and I have watched the dark people being treated badly by the fair people. I was taught to treat people how they are as people and not what they look like. After watching people being treated badly from both sides by both sides, I do not know if this is a commonly held belief. I cannot help but believe that if we treat people for who they are, and not what they look like, then this is a far more natural consequence to the treatment between people. If we predetermine our relationships in life based on color of skin, I think we lose insights no matter which race we belong to. These notions of respect between people are related in my family stories.

If we look for these ideas, then they are there for us to learn from.

One of the notions of treatment between people is something that I consider along with the process of colonization. As far as I can see, the society in which we live appears to have been kept ignorant to many realities in order to maintain conflict between groups of people. I think about how mainstream culture may view the First Nations groups in our society. Because I am fair, I have often heard the expression of ideas towards First Nations people, and these ideas are often fraught with comments which indicate a total ignorance towards me or other First Nations groups. I have also heard and viewed similar ideas from First Nations people of varying backgrounds towards other First Nations people and society in general. The ideas expressed by these people also seem to me to be fraught with ignorance, and consequently the conflict between groups continues. If we could, in some way, elevate understanding between groups by presenting accurate information and views of the world, I would hope that people would come to understand themselves and others in a more positive way. My experience has been that we continue to hold on to old practises which are destructive rather than pursuing new ways which could bring resolution to conflicts. I do not think that

there is only one way of seeing the world, and I cannot help but believe that it is not necessary for all of us to view the world in the same way in order to live in harmony. So maybe the pursuit of making everyone see the world in the same way is the destructive objective. Maybe our goal should be to entrench ways of communicating so that we can express our view of the world in order to learn about and to live with each other. With the varied nature of our society, and with the variations within the First Nations community, I am always interested in how stories create a way of communicating so that we can learn to live with each other.

I try to move away from the effects of colonization as much as possible, and one way to do this is to improve understanding between groups to communicate our history and view of the world. By using stories to describe our experiences, we learn that our heritage or cultural group cannot be defined only by the government. In the words of an elder, your culture is what you live, not what you call yourself or how you have been defined. So I think the final stage of colonization is to control the mind of the people being colonized. This control of the mind has been effective because the continued presentation of inaccurate

information between groups maintains conflict. Stories can and do mediate in this process. It is important for me to learn to define myself, and I do this through the stories of my family and of my culture. I avoid designation by the government mostly because I see it as divisive rather than constructive. I use the stories to understand who I am as a Metis, halfbreed, or mixed blood woman.

I understand my identity as a Metis, halfbreed, mixed blood, woman in this way. I reconcile within myself the different nation states to which I was born. For me this has meant self discovery and self definition. If I believe in my teaching from the elders to move towards good and to learn in my life, then I do this by taking the best from all worlds. Those worlds for me are a combination of my First Nations ancestors, my European ancestors, and the society in which I live today. To be a Metis, or halfbreed, or mixed blood woman for myself is about the synthesis of this process and the reconciliation of my world. This process involves the bringing together of the good in life, and learning through stories allows me to create my life as a Metis, halfbreed, mixed blood woman.

CHAPTER FIVE

BEING A METIS WOMAN: FAMILY

Family

To be part of a family involves being a part of complex and diverse relationships. Over time, I have heard many stories about different families. The stories told within or by a family gives order to life experiences and expresses particular values, beliefs and history. The stories of our families, particularly the families of the four Metis women participants in this study, are presented in order to describe some of our complexity, diversity, values, beliefs and history.

Being a Metis Woman: Family - The Collective Narrative

Yeah, I sometimes get mad at myself and I look at photographs and I wonder what was I doing. Well, I know what I was doing but still, why wasn't I listening to my grandparents and then, ah, why did you leave me here? Well, everything happens for a reason, so what is the reason? Well, I feel that I am so lucky because I had them for most of my childhood, you know. I had them for that space, you know, people tell their stories. But, I had all of this freedom, great freedom, and they used to say I was spoiled rotten but I never agreed with them (laughter). I had them there to provide that freedom, you know, it

made me interested in certain things. It made me interested in just being outside. My mother says we had a TV. I just clarified this a few months ago 'cause it seems to me that we never had a TV. But my mother says, yes, we did, you just never watched it. I remember riding home on the school bus and I'd kick off my shoes and run outside to that freedom. As soon as I could kick off my shoes I had that freedom and I'd take off into the farm like two miles of farm to run in. And I'd just run and I'd go tearing off. And I'd look at the birds and I was never bored, always appreciating all of that. Perhaps I got that from my parents too. I think I was really lucky to just to be there and I think, okay, I haven't lost them. I have my grandmothers all around and also I recall them and my upbringing. And this gives you a sense of who you are, it is just that and history.

If you are lucky, you got a story. He used to tell us this story. We sat around, and all we had was storytelling. No TV. My grandfather, that's my dad's father, was 18 years old in the rebellion. You can't tell anybody that because it's not in the history books, only the stories that we have here. Politically, Metis people in the early 30's, they would hide. My father would say, they would hide in the back of pool rooms or meet at somebody's farm to meet because the RCMP, the Mounted Police would watch them because they were not allowed to gather after the rebellion, and even then that had been, what, more than thirty years. And they still had to hide to look after their political beliefs. So he would tell us the story. A lot of times they got away from their

political issues. What had been said, he started telling me, is the story that there was a political leader in the community. I am not quite sure about his last name, he was a halfbreed politician, but that was when there was not supposed to be a halfbreed politician arena. He had these six black horses. They kept them in a certain barn. He always had the best horses to run with because the RCMP would always chase them even if they were going to one reserve or to a halfbreed community which was close to the town to meet the Indian people which they were not supposed to have anything to do with. They had these six horses that were real fast. Dad told us the stories that we had been after.

One night there was a full moon, he sat down and rolled a cigarette. He sat there, had a smoke and all of a sudden, there was a signal coming through the bush, and the six black horses. Of course my dad got up and looked, but they weren't really there. It was the old halfbreed politician. He was there but only in spirit. Then, I met this person who didn't even know my father, he had a halfbreed dad too. We met when I was about eighteen and we were talking, and he knew the same story we were told. This guy his dad was always at the meeting, and he was always there for the same reason because they had not lost their faith. Of course, this was not in the history books. But this was part of our history. Stories like that.

These stories were for us so you might not be giving somebody's secret away. I think sometimes that's why they are not allowed to speak their language. You know, I think the story was the truth, but they put in story form

to protect us. And the story will be, I mean, in the Aboriginal world, you would tell a story that's passed around, passed around, I mean, that's like a telegraph. This is what happened in telegraph. You tell somebody a story and it would get passed around. And then it would get to the certain person they wanted it to be to accept the story. The truth was the truth. But if this story went along and if the RCMP or the government got told the story, to them it was just a stupid untrue story. But actually it was every bit of the truth.

So they used that. They used it for protection. There is this one story supposedly when my father was born, his mother's wedding ring broke in half. It was her last day when he was born, like she died at childbirth when my father was born. She smoked a pipe. This woman with all these children, I can't imagine. I can't imagine it, when you were born in the 50's, you didn't see a woman smoking a pipe. It's her tobacco pouch that also passed into my dad's hands. We never found this pouch until my father passed on because he never showed it to us. We found this old pouch that still had the tobacco in it. It was part of his story. It was in an old farm trunk with all his collections in it. And along with these stories came his treasures, like when the stories came and there was always something concrete, like, he told us another story about the glass door knob. And we found a glass door knob in this trunk that he had. And of course this was his mother's. And there was a picture of somebody long ago, and they were dark people. I am sure it was an Indian person and maybe a Metis. But to this day we still don't know who these people were. But

it had to be someone he knew, but we didn't get to see those stories. We still have this concrete stuff that goes with these stories and that was his way. He kept this as proof because he could not write things down.

Yeah. Anyway, my Dad would like to move around, like followed his tribe (laughter). You know. It's kind of a hunters and gatherers syndrome (laughter). And here is this man who has no education. He knew if he could buy a little bit of property, build something on it, he could be allowed to make his own decisions. We moved to Saskatoon. This is when he was forty. They moved to Saskatoon where the work was. He started to play the white man's game. Okay, so he worked like he was a carpenter at his trade. That's another story. I can tell you how he became a carpenter. But anyway, he worked just about, my mom would say, twenty-four hours a day. He came and slept for a couple of hours and would go to work again, like two hours and go back to work. He had two jobs. He had enough money, and in those days properties were cheap. So he bought a little piece of land, and he and the boys, because the boys were teenagers, they built this basement, no house, just the basement. That's how we lived in the basement on his land, but at least my dad could say this is mine and you can't tell me what to do now. So he could choose what school his kids went to.

And then Indian people from a reserve would bring their horses and be parked outside our house because they were not allowed to park in the city limits. So my dad would let them leave their horses in our yard and how many

times they put them up. Mom and dad and we had these Indians parked in our back yard. So here we were. And this is the kind of things I had then, grew up with, you know. They talked about Indian medicine and stuff. And that was my dad's favourite. But he needed their medicine and a lot of times he might have been taken to the hospital emergency, I guess, but instead medicine man helped him. I mean, it was part of life for us. We were brought up with it. So I am not scared of it.

And of course there was this having land stuff. Of course it didn't last very long because my dad was on the move again. And he got drunk one night and he lost his property. It's just like that (laughter, snap her fingers). I mean, he came home and the next morning people showed up for our home. Yeah, pack your stuff.

Pool game, that's right. My father would feed us by earning money in a pool game. He was not making enough money, not enough to eat. His carpenter's tool were very important. He waited till Christmas Eve. Then he would sell these tools so that he could bring a turkey home, presents and a tree. My mom had the turkey and my dad would put up the tree. Not by selling his tools, I am sorry, by pawning his tools off. And then on New Year's Eve he would not get drunk, the only night in the year when he wouldn't get drunk (laughter). And he told the people to phone, he would pick them up, so they wouldn't drive drunk and he would collect a few bucks. And that's how he would get his tools back. So then, of course, there we were again. We started

to move. It wasn't like moving from city to city. We moved within the city.

You know, bragging about oneself at work and work accomplishments and that, honestly that I can't ever remember my mother or father talking about things that they accomplished. And my father saying I have three quarters of a section or I have two hundred head of cattle, you know. We weren't like that. It was irrelevant because my father knew what he knew, and if any people asked for his advice or needed things, he shared them. And they didn't ever ask for those other things. Like hockey night in Canada, we must have had the only TV, and a whole lot of families would come over, and then we would watch the hockey game. And we would prepare the food all day. You know, it was like when you are on the farm you don't see other kids, and I would think, wow, and everybody would come over. And the kids would play and the women would visit and the men would watch the TV all in the same space, you know. And I remember the sharing that happened, you know, as soon as you finished your seeding you weren't finished your seeding until everyone was finished seeding. Everything was everyone's responsibility. We had a responsibility for what was happening in other people's lives. If someone had some trouble, they would come and stay with you. Sometimes that was relatives that come in. There was one big event in my childhood and there has been a book published about it. Now, it was a situation of domestic violence in a family. A policeman was shot and the whole family came and stayed with us for about four days. And everybody was quarantined, and nobody was allowed

to leave their houses. And everyone was so afraid of this man and lots of stories were coming from the police about what had happened. And my father used to say he was just the man we know and we don't need to be afraid. And, uh, it went on like this for quite awhile...so I feel really lucky to have had the kind of experiences that I have had.

I know my father was not a man of a lot of words. I don't really think I ever had a conversation with my father. The truth is, it was somewhat stilted I think. And there is a whole lot of big questions that I would ask an elder now that I wouldn't ever ask my father like, why are we here? But, um, he was more a man of just being and just living and just doing things. And so, I never, for example, we could be walking all through the forest and my dad and my dog would go and we get up early in the morning. And we would just walk all day. I don't remember having conversations with my dad. And I am sure that I chatted all the way along, but there was no real discussion or analogy. If there was a task to be done he would tell you the particulars of the task, how not to waste nails or something like that, how you can reuse them, how you can make a nail into a staple, and you know stuff like that. But, you know, nothing that was of great concern like don't throw your garbage around. None of that was even ever said, ever, you just did as they did. My mom had the garden, and all of us would help with that, and my father had the cattle and that was done. There was little that came from the outside world outside of the family, you know, the odd thing. We did all the berry picking, and I could partake in any

activity as I felt like it.

You know, there was this time that my dad got sick, his heart, he was in the hospital. Dad wasn't a man of a lot of words, but when he said two or three words in context with the situation it was so funny. It was so built into the thing that was happening and he used humour to control people's moves like making them look silly. And you would feel it too, and you know when I walked out of the hospital room that time, and I felt so sad, and it wasn't so much that I thought that Dad was going to die, but it was more that I really was going to miss that, you know. The humour, I don't know how with four or five words in a row in certain contexts he could be just so funny. There is a certain kind of humour, and I don't have a word to describe it. But it's kind of the combination between teasing and a really dry wit, you know. Does your mind really work like this, I wondered?

When I was young, we never got a spanking. My son asked why was that? Well, I told him it was because I was so good (laughter). No, you weren't, you were like a little whiner. Well, how did you know then when you did something wrong then? And I said because we got teased to death about it. And he said, well, God, that could go on forever and everybody could have something on everybody, and he said then everybody is just teasing everybody. And I said, right, you know (laughter). Well, that would be a lot better way, he said, as a form of discipline because, you know, when you get a lickin all you know is that you did something wrong. You never really appreciate others.

And I think about the time my mom sent me in to feed the dog. It's on the stove, she said, and I came into the house. And there was two pots on the stove. Okay, so I feed the dog from one pot and sure enough, I feed the dog from the wrong pot. So, (laughter) when my mom came in from the barn, supper was gone. Nobody said anything about it, but for the next two years, they would say only the best for the dog (laughter). Well, maybe we ought to feed this to the dog. And it went on and on (laughing), and nobody had to tell me that what I had done was wrong, you know. But they made light of it because I felt so badly. Honest to God, and then sometimes awhile ago my mom said, remember the time you fed the roast to the dog, and I said (laughing) I don't want to talk about it (laughter)!

My family had a farm, and we would go out there, and then in the winter my uncle and my dad would take feed out to the cows. And I would go with them and see how that was done. And I would go with my dad. He drove truck, you know. I had a brother who got sick and it ended up that I would spend time with my dad. We would go for a long, long time and talk about everything, and sometimes we would go for a long, long time and he would not say anything. And I just loved it, you know. I recall the different times of the year and learning so much about things, you know. We would stop, and my dad would buy me a pop, and I remember that I always had Orange Crush. We were very poor, so this was a real treat.

I just recall so much about learning about the world outside. But not so

much by asking a lot of questions or being inquisitive in that sense. But more I remember the conversations with my dad, they weren't really conversations. We would just be driving along, and it would be springtime or something and I would say, gee, you know, the trees are late this year. And, he would say umhum (laughter), you know. And then, as time would go on maybe two or three years later, you know, a couple of years ago the leaves were out more at this time. And he would go umhum. And I never remember him telling me a lot about something but more just awareness, just awareness of what was going on.

My father used to tell me things about giving attention. I'd say, you know, it's like my son is a good worker, like, you know. I would say to him, like, but he doesn't work very well when you are not watching him or he gets kind of preoccupied. And, well, my dad would say, you know, um, my grandson and I were working and you just got to be out there with them. Eh, you got to be out there doing what they're doing and he was fine. Just like an observation, you know, he wasn't telling me, you know, nice parents, you know, you're sending your kids out to mow the lawn, you know (laughter). If you are going to work in the yard, then you're going out to work in the yard. That was what he said. That's how you motivated people. So anyway, after that I would do that. I would just be around, and it was absolutely true. I would stay there working with him and he was fine. He was fine and, you know, he would ask questions. Mostly, he watched how I did it and then he would do it. The kid's

dad, he is really handy, he has all kinds of little skills like fixing cars. He just has that sense of how to cut wood or whatever. How to work with wood and fix things, and the other day dad came over and said my grandson is a good carpenter, you know. And he says, you know, he just watches me, he just watches me, you know, and then he does it. And if it doesn't work he comes over and he says, why isn't this right? So, then you say, well, try this and he is off again. And we have these friends, you know, and all the time I was raising our kids, gee whiz, they were just specific with them. Well, then you do this, and then you do that, and they would have a list of about ten things, you know. And I thought he's not going to remember any of those things. And if you are telling them from the arm chair, it's just not going to work. It's not going to work that way, and everything I know I have learned from watching my parents. You don't walk around asking a million questions. The questions never came up, only the questions that came up as you were doing it.

Like when my mom was baking pies I always got a little bit of dough and I would play around with that dough. And if it didn't work or whatever, then, well (laughter), you know, it was never a big deal, eh. You just played with it. Like if she was sewing or knitting, you got your own little ball of wool, and it was wool that was old and had come from something else. And you would sit and you would do it beside them, you know. When you were tired you would put it down and go outside and you'd come back and it would still be there. And so that was sort of how I was taught things. You know, we didn't get like

an instruction booklet to do things.

You know, mom and dad would be doing something, and we would be doing it either along with them or having watched them already. And then, if we started doing something and it wasn't going well, then, we might say something like what is this about? And then we would be given a little bit of direction. It was mostly in the doing not listening to how by a long list of things. And how you knew how to do it was by the fact that you had seen it or were seeing it done. Like they were right with you. They made you imitate them, and sometime you might get a simpler version of what was going on.

When I hear about some of the childhood experiences that people have had and those things that created such calamity when you are young. When you are older and you think about that stuff, now it brings a real joy to recognize that now you are not hanging onto chains. What that was about was that you almost remember the creation, like the life event, was like the creation of a story you know for later on in your life. And you learn about what that was about. I remember one time we had these wild pigs on the farm, and they were like coyotes, eh. And they could be really noisy and get the animals going and nobody really bothered too much. But one time my uncle said, I'll give you five dollars or ten dollars, and to us that was an incredible amount of money, if you can catch one of these wild pigs. And I realize now that he was joshing us and me and my cousins we schemed and planned. We were going to catch one of these pigs, and when I think about it now we had all of these ideas and notions

on how we were going to catch these pigs. And we hadn't thought through if we ever caught one, you know (laughter). You know, it was kind of like a child's thinking. Finally this one day, and this took years to evolve, my uncle kept his word. If you catch one of those pigs I'll give you five bucks, you know. So, anyway, this one day these pigs come along and we corralled the pigs and got them going down this one little gully. And it happened out that they went down where we had put all these things. So, we were running along beside these pigs, and my cousins and sisters and brother were there and running along. Okay, okay, so here I jump on the pig. And they are not that big because I was only eight or nine and I had this pig around its neck. And I am on top of it, eh, and this pig was kicking me in the stomach with these little short legs, you know. Kicking me and kicking me, and I was holding on because I didn't want to let down my brother and sisters and cousins. And so I am holding on to this pig, eh, and finally I had to let go because it was just kicking me so hard in the stomach. Oh boy, my cousins and brother and sisters didn't talk to me. We lost the five dollars because of me, eh. And we would never again have this opportunity in our lives, we never did, and we never did. We tried after that, but it never happened again, you know. When I think back about that story, I think what would we have done with that pig anyway? (laughter) As kids we never thought that through. When we went to town it was a big deal. We never had our own money. It wasn't like that. I really did try to hang on, you know. But my uncle, he bought us all a chocolate

bar and that, well, was better than the money.

I know when I was younger and I think back now and I couldn't have raised my kids without my mother. I think I learned from my mother that if you don't want to be like nagging your kids all the time, you have to be in there with them. She would say, like, bring them and we will go to the river and we would go. And it was funny because in my childhood there was this big huge rock that stood out. And so I went out there not that many years ago, and that rock is not very big. Everything has shrunk, eh (laughter), like how did we all sit on that rock? But we had the kids just be themselves and explore out of doors and stuff, not to be in a shopping mall all the time, you know. The place where kids learn is the most natural place. Natural place is more conducive to kids and teaching them, and it is important to put yourself and your family in those places. We were always together, so my kids spent most of the years of their upbringing being able to explore. We would go to the park and rustle through the leaves and try to imitate all the things my mother taught me. All the stories that my grandmother told me about the world. And let them explore and feel good. And, I laugh because my son, he is so gentle, you know, we were outside one night and the mosquitos were so bad. And we were sitting there side by side, and there was a mosquito on his arm. And he looked at me and said, you know, if it didn't bite me like that you know that I wouldn't kill it. You know that, eh? (laughter) and I says, yeah, I know that.

I remember when my older son, he tends to be very gentle, I remember

one time we asked him to go get his cousin, and it was only three or four houses down. And he walked there. Well, he would have been about six or seven. It was cold then so we get him all bundled up and he goes. And he comes back about ten minutes later and he has no toque and his ears are all red. I said to him, you just left, what happened to them? And, then, here his cousin comes in and his cousin has my son's toque and mitts and gloves on. And he just looked at me and said, well, he was cold. And, I was, like, well, I thought that maybe he had dropped them or something, but here he had put them on his cousin so he would not be cold. And his look was, well, why would you even ask me that. My cousin needed them because he is little and I am big. Right, like I am six and he is little. That kind of thing, you know, very gentle and caring. Yes, we were very fortunate.

And so I am always amazed at my kids because they are so good with, they are so observant. And I never feel like I have to tell them how to do things. I feel like, when we, something like, someone bought me this barbecue. And we had to put this propane barbecue together and, oh no (laughter), here's the instruction booklet right. So, I always just, well, maybe that's the joy of having boys, but I just kind of look at them and they go yeah, yeah, yeah, we'll do it, you know. And they sort of take that over, and I sort of just watch and make the odd comment if things aren't going right, you know. Like, gee, that screw looks a little short for that, oh yeah, okay, oh yeah, okay, that kind of thing. And we sort of work our way through it, and as long as we get it so it

works (laughter) then that's good enough, you know.

But I find a real contrast in my work. The people at work are different, hey, like the opposite way of being raised, huh. I think everybody has elements of that kind of upbringing at some point in their life. Well, there is something significantly different about it, and it has to do with the way one approaches knowledge. And, um, how people's everyday lives are legitimate knowledge. It's like it's not who you are, it's not that you have degrees, it has more to do with your experience and how you come to sharing that knowledge, you know.

You know, my son wants to be an architect, and there was a young man who had just been hired to the Douglas Cardinal group. And because I was teaching the Native Literature course, we take a look at a lot of work of a lot of Metis people. And, I know, so there was some discussion about that and so I said, come on, I'll take you to school to listen to this man. Well, this man was very much like Douglas Cardinal, sort of bringing the two worlds together. Bringing some voice to a First Nation's perspective, First Nation's epistemology and how that plays itself out in our modern day world. My son was overwhelmed. He was moved by him, and then the man moved from one topic to the other. I looked at my son's face and he said, so much to know, eh, and how am I ever going to know all of that stuff? How am I ever going to come to know, you know, all of that stuff? How do you know all of that stuff? And I told him, you can go and find out this stuff from books and go to the library. You can learn all of that, but what is more important is that you remember what is

important to you. And you think about that in the context of your work. You are not an architect outside of yourself, you know. A person who works with mathematical figures is really a person, you know. And this has been your experience, and this has been the values of your family, and how is that going to play out in your life.

My son, he hates this story worst of all. When my husband and I broke up, it was about a year and a half, and my son was still quite depressed about it. And he was lying around watching TV and I said, you know, you can't keep doing that, you know. So pick something you want to do and I'll help you get started. Well, he couldn't think of anything. Finally I said, okay, if you don't pick by Christmas, I am going to pick something for you. So he had two months. Christmas came and he didn't know what he wanted to do, and my son was really talented that way in music, so I said, why don't you take guitar lessons? And he said, I don't want to. I said, just try it, you know. And I am thinking, okay, you are the one who wants to learn guitar. Why are you making your son take it? So, he goes every week when he had to go to guitar lessons he would never remember. I would always have to remind him. It's ten to five, you have to be there in ten minutes. Come on, let's go, you're going to be late, goodbye. And, he would go to the lesson, come home, put the guitar in the corner and never touch it till the next week. And I would start again. Finally, he comes home one day and says, if you want to learn guitar, then you go learn guitar. I don't want to learn guitar. Well, I was just crushed. I didn't

know what to do. Was I really doing the wrong thing or what? Well, my friend was over, and she goes, give him a little time, you know. Don't back off so easy. So, the next week his instructor said bring a CD or tape of anybody you want to learn how to play and I'll show you that. So, he took this tape of Eric Clapton, and he came home that day and he could play a song. It was like everybody get in this room, I can play a song. And he was, like, after that he just went, eh, and talk about parenting and not knowing what to do. I went to my mom and said, should I make him go? She would say, you don't want him to just watch television and I would say, yeah, 'cause he's not doing anything. And, just leave him, give him time, you know. Nothing is carved in stone. So a year after that he hears this song, you know. And he was playing it downstairs and not doing a great job at it. And the kids were outside playing and they heard him through the window and they go oh, oh. So, they tease him about that. And now, as soon as anybody mentions that song or that band, he is just like embarrassed. But, you know, he will know that sense of the guitar down there, and he will use it and he is really good with it now.

It is really odd at this stage in my life because my kids are moving on. My role is changing with them, and I am no longer that person. I have always been involved in my kid's school, but I have never seen myself as saying, okay, you are grounded because your marks are low or you can't go out tonight because you have an exam. This is your problem, and if you don't know what to do, then it is time to get the work done. And then, the mark comes back and

he only got 35. He gets his report card, and he says to me, you know, if I were you I would ground me for the rest of the year. And I say, why, is that 'cause there is no reason for you to have 35? And he goes on this big lecture about all the things he has done wrong, you know. And I say, do you really want me to do that, you know, like really? Well, it's just the idea of the grounding, mom, you know it's that I really should spend more time doing my homework. And I say, well, you already learned that, so I don't have to ground you. You already know that. You know, the hard part is always when you can expect someone else to put on all kinds of restrictions to bring out your best. But in the end, you have to do that for yourself, and that is the hard part. So I went to the school, and they said, so what do you think about that boy's mark? And I say, well it's a pretty low mark and it is probably reflective of how much work he did. So, what are you going to do about it? And I said, I am not doing anything, it's not my mark, um, and we talked about it a bit and he was quite concerned that he should have a better mark. And other parents are just grounding their kids and scolding their kids, but when I use the methods that my parents used, I never go wrong. And in the end I always have this kind of respect for them. It is more important in life to have these good relations and things will just work out, you know.

My son has talked about what he wants to do, and he is going into grade 11 next year. I have kind of told him what I see as the different options just because I work at the university. I give him some information, and we talk

about there is not one path, and we talk about options and it really is his choice. And, um, he has asked me, what do you need to do this, what do you need to get for this or that and I have told him that. And now he comes home with this 50, and there is no way he is going to get into university with those kinds of marks. And I know some people say, well, gee, you know my son's pattern is he goes to school and he has lots of friends, but he doesn't do anything. And then the crunch comes, the deadline, and then there is the absolute deadline, and then the absolute, absolute deadline, and if you don't get this in, then you will fail the course. Right. And here is my son at the absolute, absolute deadline getting all the demerit points (both laugh) and getting a 50. Okay, so, but the bottom line is that that is where my teaching ends. The real learning is when he knows. When he knows that the institutions require things, and the bottom line is either he goes there or he will have to make other choices. And maybe he will have to go back to upgrade or whatever. So, the learning is not about having a baseball bat and saying, well, all right, you are going to sit there and do it because you know at some level he does know. He knows this last term. He kind of said to me, he kind of shook his head and said that he knows what he has to change (laughter).

Well, you know, it is funny because I quit high school, went to grade 11, hated it with a passion, and I went back to school. And I did all kinds of things. I took the scenic route back straight out of high school and into upgrading. But I am absolutely in no position to be lecturing my kids about how to finish high

school and about getting good marks. So I am not in a position to speak to that and, so, I say, you know, son, when I was your age I was in a different world. Things change and opportunities change, so you have to make the assessment in your life at your time, and from what I can see if you don't get the average then you are not going to get those things you want. But maybe he will do other things that you didn't know. So, one time he made this comment to his teacher, my mom would kill me if I don't get this grade. And I thought, wow, where did that come from. But I have never said that, and that is his perception of my standards right because that is what I want for him. But it is not something I have ever said to him.

It says a lot of how our kids perceive us. I try to be myself around my kids, you know. I try not to put on airs when I am around them. I try just to be myself, and it is kind of easy because I know most of their friends and they have a certain expectation of me. So, I can just carry that on here, but at some level I don't know if my kids know me at all. And that is not so bad in some ways. My son, like, if he has money, everybody has money, and it's like, well, that is really good, you know. But you just look after yourself too. But when we give something out it comes back to you. Do the things that keep good relations, you know, and in the end you don't complain about them. If you give money away and it makes you mad at that person or if it makes you angry or if you need it and you get upset, then you have to take care of that.

The whole notion of keeping good relations is destroyed if you can't take

care of yourself. That is something you do to keep good relations. It is very important.

Yeah, one has just a million memories, eh. I sometimes wonder what my kids remember and what they will remember when they are older. They had this one friend who always comes over, and he just loves to sit in that chair and listen to stories. My youngest one is really good about it. My son had to do a speech at the sports award banquet. So, him and this girl had to give this speech and I said, so in your speech, who are you talking to? Are you speaking to the teachers, or the coaches, or who are you speaking to? Well, I think we have to speak to everybody. Well, what do you think you are supposed to speak about? And they know all of the right answers (laughter). Oh, we are supposed to say what a wonderful experience it has been to be part of the athletic program (laughter), and this just makes me laugh, ha ha ha. And, um, I said, why don't you speak to some of your experiences because really your experience is all you have. My son goes to this girl, write that down, experience is all we have to speak from, write that down (laughter). And, I go, no, no, no, that's my words, those are my words. So they sat around here for three consecutive nights sharing stories of their experience. Now, if anyone at that awards banquet could have sat through that, they would have known that the speech was said and done. What had to be done was already over, so it wasn't in the speech, it was in the forming of the speech. And, um, my youngest son is really good about, you know, when the kids come home I just

sit here and they come home from school and the stories just roll. And the laughing and the teasing and everything that has happened throughout the day. And, um, so they sat around here and told stories like remember the time that so and so scored the ball in the wrong basket. Oh yeah, remember what happened with this and remember when the ball went over there. You did a great job, yeah, scored and they would laugh, ha ha ha. And I remember about the time when, and as I was sitting there listening to them, I think, yep, that's all we have, you know, is our story and the sum of all of those stories somehow is who we are and we cannot possibly say them all.

Being a Metis Woman: Family - My Reflection

In my family, stories were told at any time during our conversations and during the everyday activities of my life. There was never an analysis of the world. The stories were just a sense of what was going on now or what had happened in the past. The stories were meant to inform us. From these stories I gathered knowledge, and I realize now that sharing and receiving of the stories is a very personal experience. This personalization of the stories allows me to interpret and to gain knowledge for myself. So, even though the stories do have a central idea or pass on a certain history, the story is always open to interpretation by the person hearing it. For this reason there was never one way to

see the world. There was never one right way to see the world. The way to see and interpret the world, the way to gain knowledge was a personal right and responsibility.

Stories were always passed on by my grandparents. Grandparents leave this world in their physical form only. When my grandparents told me about their lives, they left themselves behind because they left me their stories. I will tell their stories to my children, my grandchildren, and others so their lives will continue to be a part of mine. The knowledge from my grandparents and other older people is embedded in their stories, and I cannot escape from the opportunities to pass them on in my life. These stories define my family before me and they continue to inform my community. The process of building on stories is an everyday life event, and the stories have the knowledge to unanswered questions or information contained within their text. The stories build on knowledge which has already been given to me by my family. For these reasons, any person in my family who has left their physical form is not really gone. I carry their history, their stories within me. The stories are not dormant, and they continue to live, change, and develop as I do.

Family stories could be told to control behaviour and to understand the natural consequences of certain behaviours. I remember many stories which gave me information that was meant to protect me from harm. These stories were often related to the natural and animal world. I learned about safety and how important it was to behave in certain ways in certain social contexts. The stories also told me of how other people were expected to behave towards us. The stories also contained information about the natural consequences of behaving in certain ways. As my life continues I am understanding these stories in a more complete way. My family stories have a sense of truth contained within them, and I use the stories to understand the world.

Stories were told orally, and there were also stories connected to certain times of the year and to certain objects within our family. In my own home I have a collection of artifacts which are really just examples of my stories, my experiences in life. Some of these material objects have been passed down in my family, and some objects are those which I have collected so that I can pass them down. The objects do not exist merely in a physical form. The objects have life and meaning because the story connected to

the object is very important. The object is there for us to recreate the story. Material objects are not in my life for reasons of status or some show of success. So, for this reason it is not difficult to give things away because it becomes an act of continuing a life story. The objects in my life exist to create and recreate stories, not because they offer me a physical security.

When I think about the story circle or the use of circle activities and an object used as the way to control speaking and the function of the group, I think about the ways in which stories are connected to me in my life. The use of a material object, such as a rock or a feather in a circle activity, can create, recreate or give birth to a story. The material object has life and gives that spirit of life to the person holding it. The spirit which is contained in the object allows me to tell my story. Often the story is best told with an object from my life because it contains the spirit of my stories, my history, and my knowledge.

The family stories which have been given to me in my life also remind me of how I am connected in this life to this world. There seems to be a real pressure today to live as an individual. Individual autonomy is a highly prized personal quality, and I

consider this to be so but only to a certain point because narcissism and selfishness are warned against in our stories. As I understand the stories in their context at this point in my life, I do have a responsibility in how I behave, and this responsibility exists in two forms. My family stories describe to me how I have a responsibility to myself. I have the responsibility to be self defined and directed by growing and learning and by creating and recreating my story. I also have the responsibility to consider how I am in relationship to the rest of the world. Stories also describe to me that it is my responsibility to consider how I create respect or conflict within the world. I do not exist in this world in a totally autonomous manner, and I need to recognize how my life behaviours impact on others and the world in which I live. The stories of my family give me guidance in this aspect of life. The stories relay the message that I need to find a balance between respecting myself and my own needs and to understand the needs of others and the environment. The challenge to find the balance between self and outside of self is a struggle which is mediated and guided through family stories.

The stories in our families were told in the context of life. The stories were not meant as an analysis of the world. Analysis is

only an intellectual exercise and it produces limited results.

Analysis leaves out a crucial part of how I learn, and that is to gain knowledge and insights through the use of humour. It was important in my family to have and express a sense of humour. I have not experienced our type of humour outside of the First Nations community, and I also know that some of my experience of the humour is limited because I do not speak a First Nation's language. Humour in my family and community attempts to define our human condition and the relationships in our lives. This humour is used to teach lessons, to describe situations, and to create a release for painful emotions. The humour is central to the stories, and the best I can describe the humour is that it is a combination of the use of puns, wit and teasing. Humour is a central part of my family stories because it contains knowledge of how I am to behave in this world.

In my family, learning was not presented in the form of an object with analysis. What we learned and how we gained knowledge was presented in the form of experience and the form of story. It was my responsibility in my family to watch carefully and to perform the tasks at hand. In this way the learning and knowledge which I gained was through my own personal learning

and not filtered through someone else. This way of learning seems to be in direct contrast to many expectations of how learning has been presented to me by the education system. I also consider the way in which I have been formally trained to be a teacher, and my understanding of this training is in ways in conflict with how I understand learning and the way I learn myself. Basically, the formal instruction process of teaching appears to be fraught with analysis and removed from the experience of the student.

From my experience as an educator, students are often required to become removed from their own stories, and they are expected to adopt and assume knowledge from some undefined entity. Since I understand learning to be personal and tied to the experience of life stories, then I find teaching and the learning of knowledge are tied to the stories of the students. For this reason I use stories in my teaching as much as possible and I avoid dispensing information which is presented as knowledge. It is through the use of stories that I invite my students to learn for themselves and to gain knowledge as a part of their lives and not as an exercise in intellectual prowess. So the experience of learning and gaining knowledge, especially through stories, was

presented to me in a different way at home from the experience that I had when I went to school. I had to adapt to this process of learning in school, and it still feels awkward and unnatural. As a consequence of this experience in relationship to my role as a teacher, I now attempt to teach the way I learned through my experiences and my family stories.

The process of learning and gaining knowledge through stories is also very much a part of my role as a mother. There is a pressure for me today to accept workaholism as a healthy goal in life. What this pressure creates for me is the lost opportunities to teach my own stories to my children because we have less time to share stories and to be a part of creating those stories for ourselves. In order to teach my own children I need to be there with them. I need to be able to show them so that they have the opportunity to watch life events, and I need to be able to tell them so they can listen to the stories, and then I need to support them so that they can do for themselves. The amount of time spent away from my family is due to pressure from the work culture in my society. This culture demands a level of acceptance towards workaholism and it appears to be viewed as a prized individual quality. Devoting unhealthy amounts of time to any work

environment creates the situation where I cannot develop stories with my children. I am concerned that my children are receiving stories from society and not the stories from their family. I feel and see the pressure for my children to adopt these stories to inform their lives. I watch my children attempt to accept the stories from society and to live them out. I am concerned that they will become lost, and so I tell my children stories whenever I have the opportunity to do so. My children need their family stories to guide them through their lives. As a working woman and mother, I feel the need to balance this demand, and I do so by understanding the messages which I received in my family. I do not need to earn a lot of money in my lifetime in order to leave it to my children. What I need to do is to spend enough time with them in order to give them their family stories so that they can develop into strong people. Without their stories they will not know their own history or knowledge of their family. What I have to give my children does not cost anything except my time and the opportunity to share the stories. This is really what they need in order to grow up to be balanced, respectful people. My children do not need an instruction booklet, television, or a computer hooked up to internet. They can have all of these things anyway. What they really need first is a sense of themselves and the

knowledge and history gained from the stories of their family.

They need this in order to be grounded and to be able to sort out their own lives. They need this in order to create their own stories.

It is in the experiencing of events in life that we find the creation of stories and the creation of knowledge. I cannot develop my own stories if I become lost in assuming that I can gain experience or knowledge by creating text or moving in a world of virtual reality. The lives of people are legitimate knowledge, and they inform me about what I need and want to know in this world. It is important that I give my stories away to my children, within my families and communities because we all need them in order to make important life decisions. My family stories describe the notion that there are consequences in life, and I have learned that I have to live the consequences of my behaviour. The stories also help me to understand my limits and abilities, and they allow me to create myself as I grow. As my children grow up to be a part of our family story, they begin to understand how our family stories are fundamental to understanding their lives. I give stories to my children in order for them to be able to ground themselves and so that they may use the stories as I do in my life. I use stories to

define and understand myself, to gain knowledge and to build good relations. My family stories create my life and form the basis of my knowledge. With this in mind I attempt to earn respect from caring and intelligent people, and I teach this to my children through example and through the telling of family stories.

CHAPTER SIX

BEING A METIS WOMAN: SOUL MURDER

Soul Murder

Soul murder is a term I use in order to describe inequities that exist in the lives of the four Metis women participants in this study. The term was selected from the text of one story which is told in the following collective narrative. Not unlike the themes of identity and family, the theme of soul murder is diverse and complex. Unfortunately, the stories describe the experiences of inequity as a social reality in which many of us, as Metis and as women, must live and survive. Soul murder is destructive, but it also highlights areas in life which are not functioning for the well being of all people. The stories describe destruction, survival, and a challenge for all of us to learn how to function in an equitable way.

Being a Metis Woman: Soul Murder - The Collective Narrative

My home was in Saskatchewan. Both of us moved off to Alberta to try to make a life there. Well, some of the things that happened there, I went one day to rent a suite. And everything was fine, paid my damage deposit. I told them that my husband worked late because he worked on highways, and we couldn't come and see them until later on in the evening. And he said that

there was no problem. When I showed up with my Indian husband, the suite had been taken, even after I had paid the damage deposit.

Our first year of marriage was really, really hard. And most of it was a cultural shock, like his is mine and mine is his. I don't care what anybody says. Indian men and halfbreeds are not brought up the same because, I mean, my family even though they were alcoholics, your family was really important, like the kids were always there. Wherever you went, the kids went. Well, I found that his Indian family, they were shipped off to residential schools. Their parents didn't have the parenting skills. So my husband didn't have those parenting skills when we started having children of our own. I was stuck doing all the parenting. I couldn't understand that because my mom and dad, no matter how much they drank, they always shared the responsibility of bringing up the kids, making sure that there was food on the table and the clothes. But all of a sudden, here I was the only one, but I was in a relationship where there were two people.

Then, this going home, like back home here, if I was home, I only stayed with my folks. I didn't want to stay with his folks, you know. Of course, his grandparents wanted the kids. I mean, once you start having kids, grandparents were really important on either side. It just didn't happen. I mean, the shock was still there. Also, because I had one child who was a visible minority and one child who was an invisible minority, it just seemed like a chain. It went on and on. Several times when I go to the reserve, I actually

got run off the reserve. But people always waited until they were drunk to say anything. When they are sober, they were really nice to you. But the minute they were drunk, they ran you off the reserve.

Of course, with the alcohol came the abuse, physical and mental abuse. You were nothing but a halfbreed and I am a Treaty. This land belongs to me. You are just whatever. It took a lot out of me, especially the physical abuse, but sometimes the mental abuse was just as bad. I tried to keep my kids from seeing abuse. I did mostly. But now my sons are older. The oldest boy can remember a lot, but never said anything when he was little. Once his family got to know me as a person instead of just as a treaty number, then they started to realize their own thinking. She kind of has this background as we have. Then they started to stick up for me.

But my two sons, like their grandmother, bought them a bike. The oldest one who got this red hair never got stopped by the police, never. But the youngest one would always get stopped and his bike checked by the cops because he was a visible minority. And he started carrying his bill of sale around (laughter). And when they stopped him, he would pull it out and say, my grandmother bought me this bike. And, like it just didn't stop there in the family. When my dark son was out with his friends, the police would stop all of the kids. When the cop would drive away, even the kids would say to him, the only reason we got stopped is because you are an Indian.

Yeah. Of course, being halfbreeds too. It was hard because if there

was something stolen, even before they started stealing, something was stolen in the neighbourhood, where did the cops show up? Our door. Because it was the halfbreeds house. And my dad tried to bring us up right. But the society changed that. We started surviving. So we started stealing because people wouldn't hire us. They wouldn't hire my brothers. So they started stealing. But I can remember one night my brother came home and I was home, about seven or eight. My mom had this neighbour's beautiful cake on the kitchen table, and he just got into it. His hands were dirty because they had just stolen a car. You know, his hands were greasy because they had stolen this car. They had started off in a drug store on a street in Saskatoon. And that druggist there sold the kids drugs, and once they got hooked, he then got them into his business. My brother was high. He was not drunk. He was high. And then, he had this gun. And my dad took the gun off my brother and ran all the way along the river on the east side, not the west side. You take the stuff and go to the east side to get rid of it. And he took this gun apart and threw a piece at a time into the river.

I was 11 years away from my brothers and sister. The party would be at our place whether you were having a party or not. The cops would come. And of course the beers were gone, the cigarettes were gone. Of course, when you are four years old, you were a very truthful person (laughter).

These cop cars are coming up and all these kids were under age. We had this old house that was heated with coal. The basement was full of coal.

So everything went downstairs into the coal. And we were sitting there, of course. When you are four, you wondered why these cops were coming to the door. They don't ask anybody else questions but me. So what's going on here, little girl? Oh, then you tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth (laughter).

The police, they would come down to our house. Our house would be the first place that the police would look. So, of course, my brothers, I mean, they had these certain values that my dad was trying to teach them. They got pushed, and pushed, and pushed because that was all society showed them or the hell with it. They would blame you whether you did it or not anyway. So they started going out and doing these things. I mean, there was one time, my brother got killed in an accident. He stole a car and was in it with his girlfriend. They hit a train and were killed. Of course, she was a white girl. She was, I guess, a girl from a dysfunctional family. But they didn't call it dysfunctional then. They called it white trash. Yeah. But he got blamed because he was a Metis. You know, there was this halfbreed kid killed this young girl. Then, it was, oh, a couple of months after he was killed, he was killed in May, I think, this happened in August sometime and the police came to our house looking for him for something that he had done. He couldn't have done it. He was dead already.

So, one time my dad was driving and he had me with him. I was just a little girl. We got stopped, got picked up because the cops thought he had

picked up a little white girl. They took him to jail. Then, they phoned my mom. She had to bring down my birth certificate to prove this was my dad.

Then, when we were teenagers, I mean, my sister was really nice-looking. But a lot of times, the white guys would come in and take her out because they thought she was easy because she was halfbreed. They said, oh, it doesn't matter, let's go get drunk and we'll go over there and fuck ourselves a squaw.

Yeah, one time this guy, this is a true story, we went for a drive up in the hills because I love being outside. I love to just be outside. We went up for a ride, up in these hills to look at the lakes and stuff like that. He stopped under this tree, and he unzipped his pants and pulled them down and said to me suck my cock. And I went, what? We were driving around looking at the lakes, and that, you know and all of a sudden this happens. He said, yeah, you halfbreed squaws are good at this. And I couldn't believe that. So here I was alone with this guy up in the bush. I had already learned to say no and do the right thing in bad situations, so I got out of that one okay. It took me until I was an adult woman to figure that one out because I never put on to be a tease or to be a slut.

Yeah, or easy, you know. We weren't allowed to, like my dad absolutely refused to let us, we were not allowed to wear red when we were girls because women, like he used to say, women of the night wear red. You don't wear red. So as girls, we were not allowed to wear red when we were growing up as

young women.

My dad had this thing for us, for us girls. He sat us down and he said, I know girls being in trouble, and he said they are going to think you halfbreed girls are getting into trouble more often. And he said, I will tell you something now. He said a girl can run faster with her skirt up than a boy can with his pants down. So don't you come home and tell me that you can't say no (laughter). He was so, like he really protected us. If we went to the dance and we weren't supposed to go, I mean, this was not like what a white father would think of a halfbreed father. But my dad would go and find us and bring us home and say, look. I mean he had certain values for us, just like the white girls had like their dads had to put down for them. And for the boys, too. But I don't think that the white society thought that we would have these values.

Yeah, something like male and female relationships, it was very much like you were married and that was your husband and that was your wife. And they always said that if they had a big family, it was because they were halfbreeds. But it was not true because most of the families that did have big families were because they belonged to the Catholic church. They didn't have birth control. And they had those babies because they were given to you by God and you have them. It had nothing to do with you being a slut and having more kids than other people. And, like I have never in my life, in my entire life, ever heard that, you know, Catholic families, white families, I have never heard of them being called loose, those women who had lots of kids. As a matter of

fact, I see them more as being, you know, respected. You know, as respected because that woman, you know, gave to the church and God. She gave the Catholic church 13 more people, through having 13 children. These women were really, I think, when they had lots of kids, seen as contributors to the population of the community of Christ. Well, if you were halfbreeds and had lots of kids, you were just a slut, you know, you slept around because you wanted to have a bigger welfare cheque.

Yeah. I had an interesting conversation with this woman. This is her story. And I used to always be confused about this. I think this is really an interesting notion. I spoke with this woman some time ago. She was telling about how when her girl went to school and there was another girl in her classroom saying to her, oh you Indians, you all get a free education. Right? And then it ended up one afternoon that this one girl picked on this other little girl, punched her around, fought with her. So this Indian girl came home, was crying to her mother. Her mother was telling me this story. And I was sitting there thinking, isn't that interesting? You have a little white girl, I think that girl was in grade three, a little white girl in grade three telling a little Indian girl in grade three that she was getting a free education. But my question is, how much do that white girl's parents pay to send that little white girl to that school? You know what, it is the same amount that this Indian girl's parents pay to send that Indian girl to school.

I understand that education is a mandatory requirement to age sixteen

for all children in Canada. So who is getting a free education as well? Indian people have a special treaty right when it comes to post-secondary education. But the question is, for me anyway, have we been denied access in the past to regular education? And the answer is yes because the history tells us about how many people did not acquire the level of grade twelve so that they even could if they wanted to, pursue post-secondary education. And that's what they did with them. I mean in residential schools, especially, especially the women. They taught them a trade and that's as far as they went. Taught them to cook, clean and whatever, and off they went. And their training is very much tied to the social and economic status. And that was all the labour related trades. They never, you know, they were actually a half day school and a half day work. And half day work was to train them in the domestic area, to be nothing more than what slaves were in the states. So I get really angry when I hear this notion about free education. Free this, free that. I get really angry as a Metis person because we don't have post-secondary education rights. We never did have any of those rights. We don't have it now. We didn't have it then.

When we were growing up, we were no different. We paid taxes. We paid whatever. We were no different than the person down the road. We had absolutely none, and we still don't have the rights of a First Nation's person, and we are First Nations' descendants even though we are mixed blood. We are descendant from the First Nations. And I think that this is how the government feeds white racism towards First Nations' people. And I think that

on mass white people are very ignorant not against them but they have been kept totally ignorant. I think they are totally ignorant to what our lives are really like. I think that the government maintains that ignorance through the curriculum in the school because it does, the bottom line is, that it supports racism. And as long as the white people can make racist comments like that, like two little girls in grade three, you know, fighting about education. And the thing is that it is totally skewed. That little girl in grade three, her parents may pay taxes, you know, but the six or seven thousand dollars that the school gets, well it is from the government. And her being in that school is no different. And it is not paid by her parents. It is paid from the tax system. Just like for that little Indian girl. She has the same privilege, same privilege because it's law for all children. But that little Indian girl got beat up for it.

And school for us as we were the halfbreed kids, you need to know how to deal with the whites because you live there. That's where you went to school because it was seldom that you got a halfbreed going to the residential school. And then talk about what we had to put up with, you know, they were just as bad things, as bad things that happened in the residential school. What happened to my dad is that they were halfbreed and they were poor. They were dirt poor. My dad used to eat the garbage from the white kid's lunches. He used to tell me that, like apples and that stuff. The kids would throw away the apples after they had eaten the flesh. They would dig out the cores out of the garbage and eat that. And that was an apple to him. And I said to him, did

you eat everything? He said yes, except the stem (laughter). They used to eat the seeds. That is really rough and the core and the apple and, of course, he said that there was always a little bit of meat on there, you know. Yeah. That's what really upsets me. Indians got a bad deal, rotten deal. Try even being halfbreeds.

I remember the time I married my husband. I was Metis. I had a Metis card. Okay, you are Metis. I am a life time member (laughter). Guess what, the minute I married a treaty, I got a letter from the Metis association saying you are not Metis. You are an Indian. A piece of paper made me an Indian except that it didn't. Then I started going on to the reserve. They didn't want me there. There was still this little halfbreed girl, and they were the Indians. And she wants an education. Oh, yeah. Even when I started university, one of the Indian students, I just said to her, look, you are damn right. I have been fucking him for eighteen years, just so I can go to school. That's why I did it (laughter). Thank you very much. She got a red face and I walked away. Eighteen years I have been doing that so I can go to school. I thought, you go to hell.

These things happened, stories happened when I was a girl. But even as an adult, it just continues to go on. Like, last year we went to this conference. There was a writing centre for Indian people. They said that was for Indian and Metis, Inuit, right? So there I am sitting there and this woman from this Indian writing program, we are talking, and then she made this

comment that was really interesting when we started talking about her centre. She looked at me and she made this comment, it was right straight out. She looked at me and she said, only Indian people are allowed to write for our publications. And I just looked at her. And my partner was sitting there. I can tell he was just furious. He is an Indian man. I just looked at her. She walked away. My partner said to me, why didn't you say something, and I said, say what? He said, you are a halfbreed. I said, yes, I know that. And I think about when Indian people talk about being robbed of their culture when they were in residential school, well, when you are a halfbreed and Indian people treat you that way, like you are not a First Nations person, then I feel like I am being robbed of my culture. I guess they haven't learned that lesson good enough. Everybody has a right to their culture.

Even here I have to laugh. I don't know if I told you this story, but my partner and I went to a cafe for breakfast. Yeah, a couple of weeks ago we went on Sunday morning for brunch in the morning. We come out of there, him and I. There was an Indian woman, drunk out of her tree. An older woman, I would say mid-50's, maybe even a little older and a man who I would say to be about our age, like thirties, mid-thirties, okay, honest, close to forty (laughter). She was drunk, drunk, drunk. He was drunk too, but not as drunk as she was. He could walk but you could smell it bad, and she came up to my partner and said, oh, ahindian ahindian. He looked at her and said, yes. A hindian man and a white broad and she glared at me. Like an Indian man and

a white broad, eh. My partner, who is an Indian man, was just pissed off right there. He looked at her and said she is not a white broad. And this Indian woman looked at the ground and the man she was with looked at me. I could tell that he looked me, deep, he looked into my eyes, and he just went kind of like, sorry. He just shook his head like sorry. She didn't say anything. This old lady, she just walked away. She said, oh, come on, give us some money. We are dry. My partner looked at her, shook his head and walked away. We walked away and we got into the van. Of course, I don't say anything in those situations because this is another thing you learn as a halfbreed. You learn to shut up. I am not going to say anything. I am not gonna start fighting with a drunk Indian woman and a half-drunk Indian man in the middle of the street. I mean, I learned a long time ago that you don't fight with a drunk. It doesn't matter if they are Indian women, or white women drunk, white men drunk or Indian men drunk. It doesn't matter. I don't fight with them. I don't fight with people. I just shut up.

So we get into the van. We don't say anything to each other for a long time. Then, finally he asks me and I knew what he was going to ask me, why didn't you say something? I just looked at him and said, you know, things are different for you because you are dark. Then I said, when you are a halfbreed, you learn to shut up. You know, it took me a long time and it probably will still take some more time to know who I am, being part Indian and part white. I still struggle with that. But for most of the time I know who I am. I don't have to go

around saying what that is. Then he says to me, well, you never say anything, and I said, I don't need to. When people treat you bad because of who you are, or what you look like, well, that's just the way it is.

I suppose in ways, not saying anything is okay, but there is a problem with that. Because that is how control is maintained because you just don't want to say anything. You don't want to be a victim. I don't think you want to be a victim or to be victimized. And after, if you get out of any situation, I still think you carry that victimization with you even though you may not want to live that way. So when you are in these stories, I think somehow you know the parts that are wrong, but you become robbed. It's like soul murder. It's like soul murder, and this is what it's like to be in an abusive relationship.

You know, something that I have that I, you know, I really have these mixed feelings about it. I have my wedding album from when I was married. I know that my friend was looking in there. You know, I had this big long dress on. Well, you know, I think that it's like when I look in there, I think of all the dreams, stuff that I had on that day, all my hopes, all my expectations. You know. I look at the pictures, and my friend says, oh, you were just beautiful, you know. I think the beauty that comes through, you know, the bride anyway, is about that. It's about all those dreams and expectations. So for me, I looked at that, it's so painful because it never happened, you know. Yet I look at the pictures, I see that. I see that in my face. And I keep thinking, well, I will throw this thing away so I don't have to deal with this. And then I think no,

because maybe the children one day might like the wedding book. But in the meantime, I avoid the book. I avoid it. I don't look in there because it stirs up all that stuff. All of the pain of abuse.

I think about the whole time of being in such a sick marriage and what that does to your whole psyche and your whole mind. It becomes corrupted in a way. I can't say that you become evil or become, you know, whatever. But in a way, it becomes corrupted. It is not the way you were, like I know I was not the person that I was when I was 18, 19, 20 years old. When I was at that age, I could do anything.

But, you know, after my marriage I was afraid to do everything. You know, even now I am finding myself slowly coming out and doing things that normal people would do, you know, like visiting. I never did that really.

I was always in the company of my husband who controlled everything that I said or did, or watched everything that I said or did, you know. So being with an abusive man is like you sit back and wait for that person to say, I don't like the way you did this, whatever, you know. When it doesn't come, it kind of shocks you for a while, you know. It's like oh, wow. You become, you know, a little high, oh there is nobody stabbing me in the back or grabbing me around the throat.

And he was pretty good at beating me up, but I was pretty good at fighting too, you know. I never went down without a scrap. Maybe if I learn not to fight back, like he used to tell me that if you would just not fight back, I'd be

a lot easier on you. I fought because I didn't want to back down, you know. But anyway...(laughter). I certainly hated the person that I had become. You know, you were rigid simply because you were just waiting, waiting and waiting for the other shoe to drop all the time. This is what I thought, 'damn it. You don't realize what it is like living twenty-four hours with that kind of a man.

He really was just a rotten person, you know. My grandma, who never had a bad thing to say about anyone called him evil. And she was right. I think I had married a naturally evil person. That's abuse. You know, you lived with that fear, that tension, that anxiety for 24 hours a day. And that is basically why I lost everything the way that I did, you know. Look at the results. But I thought I can't bring up my boys like this. I don't want them to become like him, you know, they were not like him. I didn't want them to become like him. They already knew. They learned it at the very young age. They could sense his mood, you know. You be happy when I am happy. You watch out when I am not happy. You make me happy because that's your job. All that other bullshit with it. And I was so rigid and so scared. Always scared.

And I hated it. I think it was, you know, you don't only become scared of that person, you become scared of everything. I was scared to drive after a while because what if the wheels fall off the truck. You know, all the dumb things, what if the lightning hits the bathtub and blows it up. I never realized that death was probably the best thing for me at that time, you know. I was scared to be alone, I was scared not to have someone there. I was scared of

this person, scared of that person, scared of confrontation, you name it, everything. I couldn't do anything. I didn't enjoy anything because I was always afraid of something. The only thing that I should have been afraid of, of course, was him. And I was. But you know, he made me so paranoid that for the simplest things in life I didn't have any passion in me anymore. I was scared. I was scared of everything, you know.

You know, you could almost call it like brainwashing or training. I think that people can say what they want about being in control of their own individual state or being independent. But for abused women it is about the power, the control and the authority that an abusive man has because he has the ultimate power, and that is to kill you and your children. And that power was always in the closet. It was under the carpet. But it was there. And it was real and was not a paranoid reaction. It was real. And I think that when you live with that you can't say that it would not affect you. And it does affect you.

And when you hear people say, well, you know, when women get into these types of situations, it is something to do with their past or they don't think they deserve any better. That's not true. I never knew when I married my husband that I would end up the way I did. I had no idea what type of a person he was going to be. And it took what? Well, you find out a lot about people, and when you were in a really rotten marriage, you just figure you can't do a damn thing. You are no good for nothing. You get told that so much that at some point you don't even know what to do. You believe what you are told,

you believe it. That's so hard to understand. Like when you get on the other side. I don't know, but I think how the hell did I ever get there? How in the hell did I ever live there? Was I stupid? Was I really stupid do to this?

And you really question your own judgment, you know, all the time. But the thing is that you still have to get rid of all that garbage that you have gone through. You have to rekind yourself, you know, and define yourself because after years of being abused, you don't even know who the hell you are.

Once I found myself alone again, you know, I had to relearn how to be independent, and that was really painful. And I am still doing that. And I have had people ask me, why didn't you turn to alcoholism and drugs? But, you know, the thing was that never really crossed my mind at any time that I even think about that I would be drinking my sorrows away or whatever. I never thought of that. Maybe deep down inside, I thought that wouldn't work anyway. And I thought why do you need an excuse to be abusing yourself when you are supposed to be healing yourself. If you do that, then you are just abusing yourself on top of that. Maybe some people are more inclined to go to drugs or alcohol, but to me it was like I am never going to get over this, I will never heal myself if I turn around and abuse myself. Why do that to myself when I have been through all of that before. The funny thing about going through something like this, I think, is that I don't even know if I have a strong personality. But sometimes I think I am more obstinate than I was, emotionally strong (laughter) or spiritually because I know that I got spiritually strong because of it.

When you go through real shock and pain, I think that's what people are afraid of that. I always knew that. I was terrified of losing my kids. And I think as a mother, you know, that there is always this fear in your heart that something is going to happen, and you won't be there, and you can't fix it. And this is exactly what happened to me. I couldn't fix this. I remember my brother, he was telling me that all your life you are supposed to fix stuff, you know, if something goes wrong. Your husband wouldn't do it. You had to fix this. If something fell apart, you had to fix it. If there is something wrong with the kids, you had to fix it. He said that the whole time was you, you, you. He said, now what are you going to do? You can't fix this. So no matter what you do, things are not going to be back to the way they were. It was like the ultimate accident or teapot breaking. There was just no way in hell that I was going to ever, ever fix this. I have to understand that I couldn't fix it. And then, you know, you are living in that kind of fear when you have children that something is going to go wrong, you know, or you can't help them, you know, or you can't heal them. And when it does happen to you, you really know that fear is gone. Everything else replaces that fear. Your children are gone, your fear is gone because you can't do anything.

So, you don't have any fear, anything, you know, simply because you cannot do it right anyway. You know, your emotion is shocked. Your whole thinking process is shocked. But that fear is gone. It doesn't matter what happens to you, so dying is never a problem or the fear of dying. I didn't fear

that because basically I thought what do I have to live for anyway? Everything I worked so hard for for so long is gone. You know, that's why, and of course, you are put into that state of shock. It's just the most powerful medicine in the whole world to be in shock. You just don't feel anything. You just feel numb. When you are in shock, you don't even realize it. But every once in a while, there is one second when this pain comes and you fear that. I said that the first three days, you don't really feel anything. You do what people tell you to do because it has to be done. And you don't remember a lot of situations. That happened to me that I didn't remember what happened really after they told me that my kids were dead.

You don't realize a lot of times what's happening. And then it comes a little at a time, those feelings, and it's like there is this pain. It's such an intense pain. You can't describe it. You just feel it. I was always lucky that it just came a little bit at a time, never a big whopping cloud. And I remember, and I remember that feeling. But it always came a little at a time, you know. Sometimes, you know, a number of times in a day or maybe once in a few days. I think that's your body's way of just gradually going through shock. That's basically I think what helps people survive something like that. And it's not about being individually strong. Every person draws from their own strength. It is about surviving, and everybody has their own way of healing, I guess.

You know, everybody has their own way of working through their

emotions. And it is really funny that women like myself are called strong. I don't think of myself as being strong. I think of doing this because I had to. Even though I didn't have my children depending on me anymore, I had so many other people depending on me not to fall apart. And in some cases, I was making damn sure that I didn't fall apart.

You know, healing is about basically having to relive everything or at least relearn everything. You know, so many people take so much for granted, like shopping for groceries. That's probably the most painful thing, I think, that's the hardest thing I ever had to do was to go shopping for groceries. And I never went into a kid's department for almost two years. I didn't care who was shopping for whom. I wasn't going to go, and I never did. I just could not get myself to do that. You know, people go here, they go to the mall, they go to school, they go for a walk, they go for a drive, I couldn't drive for a long time, not because I didn't have my license, but because nobody would trust me behind the wheel of anybody's car (laughter). Even such a simple task as getting on a bus, or getting into an elevator, it was so painful. You have to relearn. You have to force yourself to do that all over again.

Everybody says that you should keep a journal. But it is not fair that 95% of all these kinds of things have to happen to women. Why don't we have more women that are treated better? A lot of them really do pull themselves up and start all over again. Why? Because you have got no choice. What are you going to do? It always amazes me when people say, why did you do that?

Why is this, I wonder, but mostly because we don't have any other choice as I see it as a halfbreed woman. It's like, when I was a little girl, about five, I think, there was this white man who came to the farm to help. He hurt me and scared me real bad. Now, I guess, they call him a pedophile. Later on, there was this young man coming around in my family. He did those same things. I was a very young woman, only just starting my moon time. I was so confused about that, but I know now that it wasn't right. Because, for two years or so that hurt me so much.

And for some reason it goes on. The women, you know, talk about these stories. Not too much because it hurts too much. So there was this time a little later on when this white guy took me out. He lied to me because he was older and I learned that later on. But anyway, he changed when we got alone and he just took what he wanted from my body. I tried to get away, you know, to fight him off, but he was a man and I was small. So, this is a bad story but it is true. Nothing ever happened to this guy over this, but I got pregnant from what he did. I got sick and I didn't know what was wrong with me. Morning sickness, you know (laughter). I wasn't a stupid young woman, I was just young and naive, I think. So anyway, I went to the doctor because I was sick. He was so mean to me, and I really didn't know why. Then he sent me to this other doctor, and he called me names and said that I was one of those girls, those girls, you know. I did not know how to stick up for myself because I didn't know what I had done wrong. So anyway, I was under age, and the

decision was made for me to have an abortion. This has been a pain that I have carried my whole life. It was done. Nobody talked to me at all. There was no choice given to me, it was just done to me. Then some time passed and I was with this man for some time. We were happy, I think, and then the baby came. After this he started to hit me, and, you know, force himself on me. I got so scared, I was so hurt. I just didn't know what I was doing wrong. I wasn't even twenty yet, and life for me as a halfbreed woman, I don't know. I used to think, is life like this for other women, white women, rich women? What are other women doing when they are twenty or so? I began to wonder about these things. I struggled after this with another man. He was a drinker. Every day he drank and threatened me and the kids and then finally I had had enough. I was just a young woman only twenty something, I can't remember but I left it all behind. I took my three children and left all of it behind except for them and my own body. I guess because of all these things I never knew what I ever wanted. I only knew that I wanted people to treat me good. I wanted them to care about me and to love me like I was loving them.

Then, when I went for some counselling help after I left the abuse, and I remember one time this one woman said to me, I don't understand why you didn't just go and jump off the bridge, you know. I thought about that for at least a couple of days. And I think if I would sit and think about all of those incidences, the ones that I can recall, the ones that I can't recall anymore, when you put all that together and you make an equal sign, you know, you

can't help thinking of despair. You just can't. So what is it? What is it that makes people not go and jump off the bridge? My one response, and I remember that I said this to the woman, I said, what was my option? I had to chose life or death. I could have lived a death through, you know, drinking too much, or taking drugs, or whatever or you can commit suicide. And guess what? I chose living (laughter). I mean, I don't know how you do that. But you do. It has to do with your spirit. And, because I am a stubborn halfbreed woman (laughter).

I was back on the reserve the other day. And everybody, you know, was wanting to see my new family. And they saw my new baby. There were so many old people and they were so happy. And I started talking to this young woman I haven't seen for almost five, six years now. And it was so striking, I guess, when we were comparing everything. I asked where she had been. She said, I was in Calgary for three years. She said she is basically going through the same thing I went through, you know. She said she just got really scared of the whole situation. She just packed up and she left. That was it. She's been by herself quite a while. So we were sitting there talking, you know, catching up on the kids and everything because I actually have never seen her new baby. She said it was just amazing. Everything that was happening to her was almost like what had happened to me before. And she said that her husband was getting quite violent with their domestic situations. Then they were separated. And he just couldn't seem to take no for an answer

that I wanted to be out of this relationship. I didn't want it anymore. I knew it wasn't going to change. So if I wanted to make a change, I would have to do everything. And I was trying to go to school, raise these two kids and still putting up with him and his hassle. And then she said that finally one day they were arguing and he threatened to kill. What struck me was that with everything that had happened, obviously these abusers hadn't learned a damn thing. So the anger that I had comes back, you know. What the hell did I go through all of my abuse for? There has to be a reason, you know. There has to be, like behind everything there is a reason for everything happening. But what was the reason for this? That's the one thing that I have, always have a really hard time accepting what happened but also why did it happen.

And I think why have I experienced that? I think it's like, unless you lived with the abuse or lived with an abusive man, lived with alcoholism, lived with any of those things, sexual assault, I really don't think that at some level that you could understand it. I think you can talk about it. You could empathize about it. But I don't think you can understand it. At many levels, I am still figuring it out, you know. I didn't want to go there to learn that, you know. But I think that we can't be silent. That's why it's so important, I think, to talk about ourselves, what happened to us, especially among women to share things because we learn. We learn about things. When you can't see what might have been gained from a bad thing, maybe what was gained was simply saving another woman's family. Maybe you gave her life and her kid's

life, you never know. You don't know these things. You don't want to know all that would happen. Maybe that's what it's all about.

I think Indian medicine, Indian medicine men and women have their place in society as everything else does, like doctors and counsellors. You can't use it as the cure of all your problems. At some point, you have to stand up and take the responsibility for yourself. I didn't want to go around blaming. What I want to do is take the responsibility for myself. I think that's part of the real problem of living in abuse was that you were forced to take responsibility for it and after, you have to take the responsibility for your own healing after it happens. Sometimes using the medicine man is like leaning on someone, and I didn't want to lean on anybody too long. There are times in your life, when you do. But you don't want to do that for your whole life. You don't want to be dependent on somebody for your whole life, especially for your emotional feeling. It's just not real.

Deep down inside I think I knew that. But I also knew that I had to go through all this. I would need help, but more or less I would be the one to say that I have to fix myself. I have to fix myself. I am not going to use drugs or whatever, I wasn't going to do that. But I am in some ways still the victim. And I still have to go out. I still have to make a living. I still have to live. I still have to go through every day. I could really depend on nobody but myself, really. You know, in the end you are responsible for yourself.

So really, once you are the victim, you are always the victim. True, I

have a new life. I have the opportunity to watch my children grow up and I have a job. I have my career and I have my education. But I am still a victim and I will be always. You can't get rid of that. You can't say, oh, I dreamed this up or it was a bad dream. You go through stages where you wish it was a bad dream, and you put yourself into a stage where you think it was a bad dream. But eventually you face everything that you have gone through. You know that. So you become a victim for the rest of your life. The only difference is that you don't want to be treated like a victim for the rest of your life. I will never put myself into a position that I was before. I think I will become more vocal, you know. If my marriage turns abusive, I would be very vocal about it. There will be no more of this hiding, no more little secrets. That was what I did. I always thought that was for the best. But for who? It was the guilty party that benefited from my shutting up.

Being a Metis Woman: Soul Murder - My Reflection

I have often heard it said that life is not fair, nor is it equal. When I think about these notions, I really consider what the inequity does and what the results give to us. It seems to me that a lot of time is spent mediating and reacting to the results of inequity. The basis for this inequity appears to be about the playing out of power relationships. In the power relationships which I have experienced, I recognize how difficult it is for people to share

power, to have power with someone rather than to have power over them. I do not see a trend towards developing equitable relationships in our society. I do hear many stories which describe relationships of power over people in destructive ways. I have also heard the stories which describe relationships that can exist with equal power, and these stories are guides for me to use as I attempt to change the existence of inequity in my life. In my life experience the inequities of racism, sexism, and abuse have combined forces in an attempt to destroy my soul.

Through the use of stories I have been able to describe instances of inequity. I also listen daily to the same types of stories from other women. It is important for me to voice these stories because like all stories in our lives, we need to understand who we are, our families, and how we gain knowledge and understanding from the world in which we live. I recognize how important it is to have the opportunity to speak about these stories, and the telling of these stories allows me the opportunity to begin the process of healing and reclamation of my soul. The healing process is a long and arduous task, but it is important to heal in order to pursue solutions to inequity rather than to continue to live in them. The creation of equitable life stories is only

possible if we can learn how to create a world which does not see power as a finite commodity. I cannot foresee this type of a society occurring in my lifetime, but I can work towards changing this reality as much as possible.

As a halfbreed woman, being treated in an inequitable way has involved racism, sexism and abuse of all forms. These inequities are nothing less than living your daily life as a form of death. By this I mean that you are never able to be yourself, you are never allowed to create your own story. In being prevented from this creation, I was evolving and being molded by an environment which could never produce a balanced, intact person. These processes have not ceased to exist towards me or towards the many women with whom I interact on a daily basis. I know this because I continue to hear the stories of inequity.

As a woman I have needed certain things in this life. When I have been treated inequitably I have been forced in many ways to hide the reality of my life stories. It is still not safe to talk about these stories to some people and in some environments. These stories are not perceived as valid, and to some people the stories are not even real. There is an expectation to hide these stories,

to not tell, and to make believe that these stories do not exist. It is somewhat like denying a part of yourself, a part of your knowledge, a part of your learning. So I think that it is important to tell these stories because there is a need to address these issues of inequity which we find well described in the stories. There is a need to understand how inequity exists and the forms which it takes in the lives of women. The stories describe inequities, and they also provide us with tools to use as we begin to change the inequality.

In as much as we are part of creating the stories of inequity, I have considered and tried to define my role and responsibility in these stories. If I am responsible for my own attitudes and behaviours, then I anticipate and expect the same from other people. It is this examination of self in perpetuating inequities that I think about and examine through the stories. The stories do reveal our roles, and it appears that racism needs racists, sexism needs sexists, and abuse needs abusers in order to survive and to continue to flourish. It is a monumental task to change the stories about these issues, but it can begin with me. I can begin to try to define what my story will consist of without racism, sexism or abuse. I know that this will not occur in my lifetime for I see us,

as a human family, we are but infants when it comes to human relations. What I can do, however, is to begin to expose any inequity by telling a story about it.

I think that some people really do try to find out how to relate to each other in positive ways. I consider the popular print and media which are focusing on First Nations people, and I see it as an attempt to get to know us. Popular culture wants to know and to see First Nations people as other than what they have been depicted as in the past. The problem with this is that it mystifies the people and robs them of their humanity. As a halfbreed woman I see how my community is not unlike many other communities. We have a mixture of personalities, and this includes the full spectrum of types of people as in any community. We do, however, have a very different and current history. This history has produced a people in need of healing. The different types of healing that we need are presented when we talk about our stories of inequity.

Our stories of inequity seem to have two parts to them. One part of the story describes the actual situation and the pain that is a result of living with inequity. There are stories which describe

these particulars, and I think that it is important to listen to these stories. It is important because the women have to say them in order to understand how this story is a part of their lives and a part of their knowledge. The women need to begin to understand how their story is emerging and how this contributes to their relationship with this world. I am called to listen to these stories because contained within them is an answer for the woman who is telling the story. It is important to listen so that we do not create the story for the women themselves. I have often heard that being treated inequitably is a condition of the person being treated that way. I have heard this in comments towards myself when I lived in an extremely abusive relationship. What I experienced was that notions about inequity are often those of another person, and often my story was not being told. As I listen to other women beginning to tell their stories of being treated inequitably, I have watched how, over time, a different understanding of these situations is beginning to emerge. This description of my reality, meaning my own stories, does give me the knowledge and understanding that I need in order to address the issue. If I am removed from the story then I am removed from myself and from the knowledge that I can attain in order to address the inequity. At this point in time I am able to tell the stories of inequity in order

to pursue solutions. This was not always so. At another time in my life I was not able to tell my stories of inequity because I did not understand them, and I was not accepted if I told those stories.

The second part of the stories about inequity is the spirit required in order to address the issue, whatever it may be. My spirit is the expression of my story. I need to understand my stories of inequity in order to gain wisdom from them instead of continuing to live with the stories as a form of pain. In the telling of the story of inequity, I come to understand my role and the role of others in needing to address the issue. My spirit is somewhat like a flickering candle. There are low points when you do not know if you can or will survive. When I was able and willing to tell the story I was able to rekindle my spirit because I claimed my story. Unfortunately, there are many women who do not survive.

As a halfbreed woman I have been given stories to govern my behaviour and to give me expectations of how I am to be treated with respect. Rules were described and handed down to me from my family and community. I have often considered what people

think about us, and I have heard their misconstrued ideas about the realities of our stories. As a result of not being able to tell these stories, and because of these misconstrued notions about my stories, I was conditioned to be quiet about my life stories. This conditioning was well entrenched and was fiercely fought if I tried to present my real life stories. I had to hide and be ashamed of my life experiences, and I was not able to tell my real story. This pressure to hide is still there, but I am beginning to tell my stories of inequity. I want to own these stories, like the other stories in my life. I want the story to nourish me and to give me knowledge like the other stories in my life. I need to tell these stories in order for them to be available to me in this way.

I am also telling the stories now so that I can address the inequities. The stories of inequity give me the ability to share my knowledge about these experiences, and this provides the opportunity for others to learn about the inequities. The telling of the story gives me the chance to describe my life so that other people can decide for themselves how to address the inequities. It is also important to claim these stories so that other women do not feel isolated from their stories and their lives. In this process of reclamation I come to own my voice. My voice, the ability and

opportunity to tell my stories gives me the chance to heal.

It is also important to describe these stories so that I can define who I am by understanding myself, my family, and my community. It is important to understand my history so that I can understand why certain things have happened to me. I need to be strong in order to say what needs to be said because saying what really happened, the basis of the stories, is not an easy experience. I have to be willing to share the story, and it is difficult at times to tell this type of story because of the continued pressure to keep silent.

One of the ways to address the inequalities is to tell the stories. Those people who are responsible for the inequities are exposed when I tell the story. It is important to listen to the entire story so that the knowledge presented in the text is considered. One of the practical ways that the stories are now being told is in the form of healing circles or support groups. These group situations provide the opportunity to tell the story of inequity. These groups are very successful, and healing does result from the telling and owning of the story. Another woman who may have the same type of story can understand my story in an indepth way. So

sharing of the stories is important because we can share the knowledge which we have gained by listening to and telling other women who may be in the same situation. If I keep silent about my stories I will not learn from them. I will be separate from my knowledge. I need to own my own stories of inequity.

Another important reason to tell the stories is to expose the situation, to expose the life event in an attempt to stop it from happening again. The stories are not meant to horrify, shock, or evoke pity. I share these stories with other women, younger women, struggling women, in order to help them to understand their own stories. The telling of these stories allows me to build individual, community and collective voice. In the telling of the stories I am also able to guide other women by describing my stories of healing. When other women see me as a real person and they hear my stories of inequity, they become reflective about their own stories of inequity. When other women tell their stories to me, I come to understand my own healing process in a more enlightened way. In these ways the telling of the stories creates a symbiotic and reciprocal process for the sharing of knowledge and information about the inequities which we face in our lives.

I also think that it is important to tell my stories because it makes it difficult for those who created the inequity to continue to do so without exposing their part in the creation of the story. I have been a victim of overt types of inequitable treatment, and I am becoming more and more aware of the ways in which covertly I am being treated inequitably. The more that I share these stories, the more these realities become true to me because I begin to claim the stories as my own, and they inform me by giving me knowledge.

I have learned to talk about my stories of inequity. I also recognize how I am often still prevented from creating my life because of the inequities which continue to exist. I am not naive to think that I will be able to create my life stories free from inequity because there are too many variables which exist to prevent such reality at this point in time. I will, however, continue to speak about my stories of inequity so that I can move towards owning those stories and the knowledge contained within them. I will continue to speak about the inequity so that I can move towards good in life and to create good relations. This is accomplished by telling the stories.

My story is my life, and if I stop telling my stories, then I will not survive because I would then be separate from my knowledge. All of my stories must be told, the stories about my identity, my family and the stories about the murder of my soul. If I leave out some of my stories, then I am not giving out complete knowledge about myself. If I am forced to leave out part of my story, then I am being forced into censoring my history. So, I have to be able to access all of my knowledge from all of my stories. I have to do this for myself and for others. I have to resist being forced into presenting my life as others want to see it. I have to say this is who I am as a halfbreed, Metis, mixed blood woman. Listen to my story. Listen to our stories. You will be invited into a world that is real.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONNECTING THE CIRCLE

Making Connections in the Circle

As I enter into this part of the thesis I am considering my intentions in engaging and committing myself to five years of work in order to obtain a master's degree. I am attempting to articulate my understanding of the importance and significance of this thesis not only to myself, but as a contribution to the development of knowledge. As I consider these ideas, parts of the entire process of the writing and studying for this thesis are very clear. Some parts are not yet clear. I am patient at this time, however, to wait for the development of this story as insights will be revealed to me as time passes. It is the parts of clarity in the writing and studying for this thesis that I discuss in this chapter.

Initially, my purpose for writing this thesis was to describe and reflect on the stories I hear, and participate in, as a Metis woman. I have presented a description and reflection on our stories in chapters four, five, and six. I now want to describe how I understand the ways in which these stories create a form of knowledge which I access in order to make meaning out of my life. Since I am solidly drawn to two different views of the world, that being a view

from my First Nations ancestors and a view from my European ancestors, I am constantly engaged in the process of articulating what I view as the intersections of those views of the world and the ways in which they differ. I cannot separate these processes as I can only perceive the world, I can only understand my stories as connected to the knowledge which they offer to me. With this insight, I understand why I am so intrigued by the stories in my life because they offer me the knowledge which I need in order to make sense of this world.

In this context, I appreciate the words of Patricia Monture-Angus (1995) when she states that "it must also be remembered, especially by Aboriginal individuals, that the roots of our oppression lie in our collective loss of memory" (p. 235). Our collective loss of memory is tied to my separation from my knowledge and the basis from which I receive that knowledge. During my lifetime and the lifetime of my ancestors, there has been an expectation to be removed from my stories, and I understand this separation to be the formative relationship between loss of knowledge as a result of loss of story. I understand this breakdown from the perspective of a Metis person and as a woman. In order to address the roots of my oppression I need to claim my story, my knowledge. The writing of this thesis is one way in which I come to terms with this reclamation.

As a Metis woman I perceive myself as very much a part of the human family from which I have evolved. In my humanity, I cannot separate the

relationship to knowledge which I gain from the stories of all people. As well, in respect to my European ancestors, I realize and recognize points of commonality between the stories from these people and the people who are my relations of First Nations ancestry. In order to pursue the goal of developing and maintaining good relations, I am called to respect and understand the knowledge from many views of the world. For this reason I see racism as a dysfunctional aspect of our conscious and unconscious reality. Racism is about power, not about people. Racism is about power, not about developing relationships. Racism is an easy way out because it is much more difficult to find solutions in order to live in harmony than to use force and oppression to continue in power relationships which are determined by the race to which a person belongs. For this reason

I hope to benefit from what we learn of the other's world... I also hold fast to a common core of identity that defines us as human beings. We can communicate because we share that human center. We can communicate because we listen to one another's stories. We can communicate because we are characters in one another's stories. (Ridington, 1990, pp. x - xi)

Linking the Connections

In consideration of the preceding points, I intend in this chapter to link the stories which I have described and reflected on to literature which I have considered to speak in support of my ideas. I have gathered the stories from four Metis women, and I will make sense of these stories by describing the relationship between how the knowledge presented in the stories relates to the

themes of identity, family, and soul murder. The stories are an example of *isumuqsayuq*. From a Metis woman's perspective, I consider the following passage as essential in understanding the concept of *isumuqsayuq* and how knowledge is created.

Isumuqsayuq is the way of passing along knowledge through the observation and imitation embedded in daily family and community activities [such as the sharing of stories], and integration into the immediate shared social structure being the principal goal. The focus is on values and identity, developed through the learner's relationship to other persons and to the environment. In contrast, *ilisayuq* is teaching which involves a high level of abstract verbal [or written] mediation in a setting removed from daily life, the skills for a future specialized occupation being the principal goal.
(Stairs, 1995, p. 140)

As well, I will discuss how my review of literature, or in other words the process of *ilisayuq* as described above, relates to the description of narrative as knowledge. My attempt to understand the relationship between how practise (the stories) informs theory (the literature) and the circular nature of this relationship, will be articulated as I consider the purpose and significance of this study. To end, and then to begin again as in the circle of the story and the circle of life, this chapter also presents a final story and a final collective narrative. With this in mind, chapter seven attempts to build a bridge between my study and the contribution which it may make to the development of knowledge.

The bridge is an attempt to articulate the gap which remains in our knowledge about the contribution of expressive forms like storytelling... Their (lives of Native Elder Women) life stories tell us as much about the present as about the past, as much about

ideas of community as about individual experience; they call our attention to the diverse ways humans formulate such linkages. When they talk about their lives, these women use narrative genres familiar to anyone sharing their cultural background but not always clear to cultural outsiders. (Cruikshank, 1990, p. ix)

Themes

I have been somewhat reluctant to use the word themes in order to present the stories of the Metis women who participated in my study. However, I am at a loss in the English language to find words to describe how I understand the idea of how our stories are related to each other. At times, I have found the English language to be incomplete in this way because, I suppose, it contains the necessary elements required for articulation of ideas for those who use it in a primary form. For me, though, I find that there are senses and understandings of the world that I struggle to describe using English terminology. For this reason I discuss the themes which arose from the stories of the Metis women, but I also see how the stories cannot be solely determined by my categorizing them into themes. The stories have many aspects to them which are related to each other, and there is overlap. The reason for this overlap is that our lives and the stories which emerge during our life events are not compartmentalized. So, the writing about themes is one way in which I attempt, as best as possible, to make meaning of the threads of knowledge by presenting the stories thematically in the form of a collective narrative. My presentation of the stories thematically in this form of a collective narrative is only one way to understand the stories, and the reader will interpret

the stories as they make sense of them. For as reader and writer alike, "people strive to organize their temporal experience into meaningful wholes and to use the narrative form as a pattern for uniting the events of their lives into unfolding themes" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 163).

Identity

I have been chasing myself around for too many years, trying to fit into [a society]... that First Nations or women had no hand (or heart) in shaping. [How can] I go there looking for my identity or a reflection of my ancestors? The truth is not out there for us to find. It is in our hearts. All of those years of living in my mind just took me further away from developing a full understanding of myself... I have been struggling a lot with questions of my identity and where happiness rests for me. I am frustrated with the image of myself I see the world reflecting back... "professor", "academic". All these images are rigid and they repel me. Do not put me in a box I had not hand at carving. The beauty I possess is as a woman and particularly as a mother. My children are my teachers. My woman's identity, in turn, flows through my culture. ... My words are a colourful tapestry. They are my art. My struggle is to recover the identity that allows me to walk in the way of beauty. (Monture-Angus, 1995, pp. 51-52)

I do not really know how I begin to describe what it is like to understand myself as a Metis woman living in this society today. I have received so many messages, so many presentations, of who I am and how I should or could be that confusion is a natural consequence to the process of receiving this information. I do, however, have a clear sense of how I do not fit into these messages and expectations of me living in this society today. It is in the understanding of the contradiction between who I am according to myself, and who I am according to others, that I find the answers to many of my questions

about identity.

I think that I needed to understand myself particularly, but not wholly, as the following two notions. The two notions are that of being a Metis, meaning being a mixed blood person, and as a woman. It has been a struggle to understand the influence of being a descendant of First Nations because of my experiences and because of many messages which I have received about First Nations people. The experiences and messages have been significantly negative. I have had to understand how these negative experiences and messages related to me as a person. If these experiences and messages were true, then I was doomed to be an inferior person incapable of a positive life story. I also had to come to terms with my European ancestry, and I understand this aspect of my person as my being a part of the human family. Within that family there are many positive, as well as negative, experiences and messages.

In order to understand myself as a woman, I had to come to understand how I was not privileged to the world in the same way as men have been in our society. When I was a young woman I never considered that I would be treated differently than men. I soon learned, through life experience, that the oppression of me as a woman in this society is so subtle that it takes half a lifetime in order to become aware of the many forms which it takes. There are countless and limitless ways in which women are excluded and treated in inequitable ways. This inequity does not stem from only situations of overt

abuse. In fact, I now understand the subversive forms of inequity towards women as being the most dangerous because they appear to be the most difficult to come to understand and describe. Then, it is difficult to address because some men and some women want to deny that the inequity exists. Once we can accept, understand, and describe the inequities which exist, then we can move towards addressing them. As a human family, I do not believe that we have even reached the level of moving past denying that there is a problem of inequity in the relationships between men and women.

As I consider the factors of being Metis and woman, then I can come to understand better my confusion about identity. The resolution of this understanding of my identity, in one way, is provided to me in the form of stories. It is through stories that I come to understand myself and to reconcile the messages and experiences which have I had as a Metis woman.

Human identities are considered to be evolving constructions; they emerge out of continual social interactions in the course of life. Self-narratives are developed stories that must be told. ... People conceive of themselves in terms of stories. (Polkinghorne, 1988, pp. 106-107)

Family

It may be that there is not enough recognition on the part of educational institutions to validate the importance and significance of learning which occurs in the family. From my perspective as a Metis woman, this lack of validation may occur because the institutions of education are presented and supported in our society as the only and the best way to gain knowledge. This situation may

have occurred because of the absence of the stories of many people and the expectation that all people live and create the same story. In the notion of sameness, I think that there may be a sense of attempting to find an answer for all problems or questions which people may have. I have an alternate view to this expectation of sameness of story. I think the real challenge is to find respectful processes which celebrate difference and provide the opportunity for the sharing of knowledge through the telling of stories. I say this because I have experienced the gaining of knowledge from educational institutions, but only in certain ways. Now that I am older, I look back and see what institutional schooling has given and offered to me, and I can also see how this has only been one form of learning in my life. The learning which I gained from institutional schooling was limited and incomplete. I do not expect the educational institutions to provide all forms of learning in life, but stories can be used to present a form of knowledge.

In fact, my learning and my gaining of knowledge has come to me through my family in the form of stories told and stories created as we lived.

An dah stories you know
dats dah bes treasure of all to leave your family.
Everyting else on dis eart
he gets los or wore out.
But dah stories
dey las forever.
(Campbell, 1995, p. 144)

The stories from my family were also an expression of knowledge which has been passed on from generation to generation. We gained our knowledge

through experience. The stories became created as the family grew and changed. We evolved, and our stories became an expression of this evolution. And, as each successive generation of people in my family evolved, we passed on our knowledge through the passing on of our stories.

Contained in our stories, passed on within the family, is a clear sense of a philosophy towards the world. The stories possess the expression of values and beliefs which allow me to make meaning and sense out of the world in which I live. Since this process of sharing stories is a central aspect to the sharing of knowledge in my family, it is necessary for me to share my stories with my children. Like the relations which have passed before me, I do have a clear sense that the relations who live after me need the family stories in order to gain their primary and fundamental knowledge of the world. My family stories center me and ground me as a person.

Our concept of the family, our identities, our acceptance of culture and tradition are all reflections of the atmosphere in which we are raised; in essence, our families are the foundations for learning in our lives. (Kennett, 1995, p. 153)

Soul Murder

I certainly do not know everything about designing and maintaining balanced and harmonious relationships, but I do know something about this issue because I have my stories. From my stories and the stories of my family, I gain the knowledge which describes how relationships can exist in balance and harmony. With the ability to know how relationships can exist, as a Metis

woman I attempt to practise a better way of conducting myself in relationships. As well, I understand the importance of being able to address the oppression, colonization, and abuse of myself as a Metis woman by having the courage to own my own stories. The importance of owning the knowledge contained in these stories lies in the notion that I must seek out these better ways of relating so that I can describe my story in order to nurture future generations of people. My freedom as a Metis woman, who has been treated in inequitable ways, is directly related to the freedom of those who attempt and, at times, succeed in destroying my soul. The process of owning the stories which describe the murder of my soul is necessary so that I can heal and so that I can move towards practising balance and harmony in all of my relationships.

What Aboriginal women as a people have lost over the last five hundred years is our ability to live in harmony with each other. Aboriginal women have survived oppression, colonization and abuse. Now we seek recovery. Recovery and healing will only come when we learn to walk in balance again, with men, with the leaders, with the children, with the Elders, and with the many nations that have come to this land. For me, seeking harmony is striving to reach a higher standard than mere justice. (Monture-Angus, 1995, p. 243)

When I was in the process of living the stories of my abuse, I did not know how being isolated from my stories was a key factor in preventing the healing which I cried for many times. I knew that something was wrong, but I did not know what that was. I knew that I was being separated from my knowledge, my stories, because I could not gain new knowledge and I could not heal. When I lived separated from my stories I was forced into an isolation

which also prevented me from being part of the community which could provide an opportunity for me to heal. This isolation, the pressure and expectation for me as a Metis woman to not own my own story, was and continues to be a key factor in maintaining inequity. When I was finally able to blurt out small portions of my own stories of the murder of my soul, it was only then that I was able to begin the process of healing. The significance of being able to tell the story does not lie in the blow by blow descriptions of the oppression and abuse which I suffered, the significance lies in the fact that I was able to own my own stories and gain knowledge of the murder of my soul and then to share them in a safe community. I found this community solidly planted with other women who lived to articulate and to own their stories of soul murder. In this process of collective voice, we began to heal.

As a Metis woman I consider why this process of collectivity is so important to me, and like many other ways of gaining knowledge, I learned about this notion through a First Nations woman. This woman described to me the societies which First Nations women used to participate in. The reason for the existence of the societies was not to relive or exaggerate events in life, the purpose behind the societies was to experience collective voice and to learn from it. The learning from it was really meant to find solutions to problems by searching in yourself for solutions and not by the process of being told what you should do. The societies were for all events in life, those which were difficult and those which were joyous. The sharing of stories within the society

of women had been lost to some degree. But in many ways women still tell their stories to each other, and the sharing of stories appears to be re-emerging more and more as a common event in our lives. We are now beginning to own our own stories and we are describing them in order to learn what it is that we need to learn for ourselves. The existence of societies in their previous form may be changed, but they have not ceased to exist. At this point in time, our societies are formal and informal in nature, and they heal us by allowing us the opportunity to gain knowledge.

Personal and collective stories construct versions of reality that endow experience with meaning. Stories, I believe, both teach and heal by encouraging individuals to observe and reflect on the personal self rather than to blindly identify with it. (Narayan, 1991, p. 132)

What is Knowledge Anyway?

I have spent a lot of time considering the notion of exactly what is knowledge? What is it really? I have come to this understanding at this point in my life. Knowledge, in one form, is an attempt to describe what we know through experience. In Webster's Dictionary, "knowledge means what is or can be known by an individual or by mankind [women too]. Knowledge applies to facts or ideas acquired by study, investigation, observation, or experience" (Merriam-Webster Inc., 1986, p. 665). Theory is an attempt to articulate the knowledge and perspectives that people have about their experiences. In a primary way, this knowledge and perspective in one form is given through the use of stories. It seems to me that this is why no theory is complete nor is

theory stagnant. As people, we are in the continual process of articulating and discovering knowledge. And knowledge, like the story, is constantly evolving and is created as life events unfold. The stories carry within them the foundations and development of a form of knowledge.

As a Metis woman I have encountered situations in life which did not include my knowledge. My story was and is still not present in many ways. The importance of describing my stories lies fundamentally in the importance of my stories being considered as part of a body of knowledge. No other person can do this for me or for other Metis women. My stories are particular to me and my life, and the knowledge contained within my stories is a form of legitimate knowledge. This legitimate knowledge is best described through my stories because the abstract, formal presentation of stories which I have encountered in mainstream society represents just that - their own form of legitimate knowledge. My stories are a combination of my heart and my ability to feel, and my mind and my ability to think. I do not separate these processes when being informed by my legitimate knowledge because my heart and mind inform me in symbiotic ways. It is impossible to separate these processes for they are irrelevant without each other.

We have to start uncovering the myths, not just the ones that are so obvious to us now. Education [gaining knowledge] is not just about formal learning. Formal education is just the tip of the iceberg. Education is also about understanding our real life experiences in both our hearts and minds. ... My obligation is to a double understanding. ... People develop intellectual capabilities. This involves exercising and developing one's mind. But to a First Nations person this exercise is an incomplete way to develop

knowledge. True knowledge involves not only mind but also body, spirit and emotion. ... Body, spirit and emotion are systematically disappeared from so-called higher education. I cannot be a healthy individual without a good mind, a healthy body, as well as balance in both spirit and emotions. ... Teaching the mind is not enough. (Monture-Angus, 1995, pp. 83-84)

Knowledge is a difficult concept to define and understand because of the nature of its development and the fluidity of its change. My ability to know something is found in the ability to develop an understanding of meaning while combining the mind, body, spirit and emotion of my human being. I describe my knowledge, what I know, as a combination of my mind, body, spirit and emotion when I tell my stories.

A function of the human sciences is to read or hear and then interpret the texts of human experience. These disciplines do not produce knowledge that leads to the production and control of human experience; they produce, instead, knowledge that deepens and enlarges the understanding of human experience. This kind of knowledge of the texts of experience, from narrative, is derived from a whole set of skills, such as an awareness of how texts create and carry meaning, how structures and prototypes organize the part of expression into meaningful statements and discourse, and how transformative principles relate meaning to different types of discourse. (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 159)

The Connection Between Stories and Knowledge

My story makes my life real. In other words, my story gives meaning to my life events, and with my stories I am able to create and recreate my life. My stories are all that I really have because my stories are who I am, and they reflect the knowledge of those who have gone before me and the knowledge which I have developed as I have lived my life. Stories provide me with the

opportunity, in a primary way, to make sense of the world and my experiences within that world.

The tradition of oral history as a method of sharing the lessons [and knowledge] of life with children and young people also had the advantage that the Elders told us stories. They did not tell us what to do or how to do it or figure out the world for us - they told us a story about their experience, about their life or their grandfather's or grandmother's or auntie's or uncle's life. It is in this manner that Indian people are taught independence as well as respect because you have to do your own figuring for yourself. (Monture-Angus, 1995, p. 11)

For this reason, I have included the stories of the four Metis women participants in this study in the form that they were spoken. I have presented the stories intentionally in this way, as collective narratives, so that the reader can make her or his own meaning and gain her or his own knowledge. I have also provided the reflections on the collective narratives as an example of how I personally make meaning from the stories in order to gain knowledge. Both the collective narratives and the reflection present the articulation of stories which the reader will make sense of and gain knowledge from for herself or himself.

It is important to understand this relationship between stories and knowledge. As a child I often listened to stories, many forms and types of stories, which provided me with the framework with which to proceed later on in life. And I continue to gain knowledge through stories. Stories were not meant for entertainment purposes only. It is the relationship between stories and the knowledge which is contained in their text that exemplifies the reason for their other purposes. Even in the stories which are designed for entertainment, there

are numerous bits of knowledge which I use in my everyday life.

The basic figuration process that produces the human experience of one's own life and action and the lives and actions of others is the narrative. Through the action of emplotment, the narrative form constitutes human reality into wholes, manifests human values, and bestows meaning on life. Emplotment composes meaning out of events. ... Narrative meaning consists of more than the events alone; it consists also of the significance these events have for the narrator in relation to a particular theme. ... We live emmersed in narrative, recounting and reassessing the meanings of our past actions, anticipating the outcomes of our future projects, situating ourselves at the intersection of several stories not yet completed. (Polkinghorne, 1988, pp. 159-160)

The Absence of My Story, My Knowledge

In coming to terms with understanding stories and the knowledge which they contain, and the responsibility which I have to develop my knowledge, I have come to understand some of the ways in which my story has been absent from society. In particular, one of the ways in which I continue to experience the absence of my voice is from institutions of schooling. These domains of learning perpetuate a certain kind of knowledge within the society in which I live. I am concerned about the absence of my stories and my knowledge within that institution. It has taken me all of my life to understand this absence.

As a child I never experienced the stories of my life in the classroom. I never saw or heard about me or my people and how they lived and what they believed in. I did experience an expectation, a set of beliefs as presented through the stories of the institution of schooling which I attended. The two stories, mine and the stories of the institution, seldom converged as one, and

this left me feeling as if I was inadequate and an outsider. As I grew older, I continued with my schooling, and during my undergraduate program at the university level, I began to be enlightened, in certain ways, but mostly through the passing on of information to me which I was expected to accept as knowledge. Again, I found myself in conflict with some of the information which was being passed on to me as knowledge. I found the knowledge to be valuable in ways, but incomplete. So I began a graduate program because for some reason there were and are still many unanswered questions about this knowledge which I seem drawn to seek out. Maybe I am just trying to identify what the basis is for the conflict which I have experienced throughout my life in the sense that I have often felt that I am an outsider and that my knowledge is inferior. I have thought that maybe this is a condition of being Metis and being woman. I was searching for understanding of why the knowledge presented in my schooling seemed incomplete. My search for understanding knowledge and how stories provide an opportunity to discover that knowledge has led me closer to resolving some contradictions.

A primary contradiction which I can best articulate at this time is that my stories, my knowledge, as a Metis child and now as a Metis woman, have been absent. I have not often seen or heard accurate reflections of my stories and what I know. In particular, my stories and knowledge have not been a part of the knowledge which is presented in the schools which I have attended. As a result of not being a part of this presented knowledge, I considered myself to be

inferior and to be an outsider. This greatly affected what I thought I could achieve in this life and what I considered to be realistic goals for myself. Since I perceived the institutions of schooling to be the authority in dispensing and creating knowledge, and since my knowledge was not reflected as a part of that experience, I had to adapt and accept other knowledge as my own. In becoming more enlightened about some of the ways in which schools have not included my knowledge as part of the knowledge which is presented, I am better able to begin articulating exactly how and what constitutes this absence of knowledge.

If I, as a Metis woman, have experienced the absence of my stories, my knowledge as a part of the knowledge presented during my schooling, then I can better understand some of the needs of First Nations students. I do not want to discuss the issue of First Nations education in this document as it is an issue which is large and outside the parameters of my study. However, the absence of my stories and my knowledge reflects upon this issue because it identifies one of the ways in which I, as a First Nations person, have been excluded. As well, I am able to identify with the results of my own feelings of being inferior and an outsider as a result of this absence of knowledge. So, I believe that one of the answers to the large issue of First Nations education is to include the stories and knowledge of First Nations people as part of knowledge which is presented in schools. In this way, feelings of inferiority and being an outsider, or being alienated, may be avoided. If the knowledge

presented in schools can include the stories and knowledge of First Nations people, then we may be able to learn from each other. This idea of inclusion does not create a situation of exclusion or superiority over other knowledge which is presented during the experience of schooling.

There is a teaching that explains that you must know where you have been in order to know where you are going. This explains why it is important for us to understand the history of our nations. ... In this regard, there is a further reason why we must carefully pay attention to how we are defining First Nations education. ... Therefore, I think the answer, today, rests with us. ... I have thought a lot about what education is. For me, what education must be about is inclusion and not exclusion. It must be about giving each and everyone of us our own good voice. (Monture-Angus, 1995, pp. 86-88)

Mine/Our Story

It has always been difficult to see myself in a vacuum - unrelated and unresponsive to the world in which I live. I have strived to find the distinction between mine and ours, the individual versus the collective story. I now perceive this expectation to be unnecessary because it is impossible to be disconnected from myself, my family and my community.

The traditional understanding that has been shared with me indicates that this construction is a false one. Individual rights exist within collective rights and the rights of the collective exist within the individual. Any preference to either notion will fundamentally violate the culture of Aboriginal peoples. (Monture-Angus, 1995, p. 235)

Since I have given up the struggle to make a decision about the mine - our debate, and since I now understand why it was such a debate for me, I am clearer about the understanding of stories as a form of knowledge. I am also

clear about speaking from the authority of my own voice and from my own experience. I cannot speak from any other authority because I do not have any other knowledge. I only have my own stories, and those stories are validated and supported by other Metis women in their entirety or by a common point within a story. For this reason, I find many of my notions about what constitutes knowledge is supported and reinforced by other Metis women. For this reason I find knowledge in the collective stories of Metis women to be accurate and culturally relevant. In this representation of our voice, the common experiences are expressed and we describe how we make meaning in our lives.

The goal of research into the production of meaning is to produce clear and accurate descriptions of the structures and forms of the various meaning systems. ...it provides a kind of knowledge that individuals and groups can use to increase the power and control they have over their own actions. (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 10)

The construction of the collective story is a natural process. I cannot describe how I understand the collective story except to say that it just feels right. Within one story an idea will relate to another or describe in more detail a concept within another story. The juxtaposition of the collective story is an expression of how I see the stories from my view of the world. The collective story is also important because it indicates how our lives are similar and how we experience and express a collective reality. Hearing and understanding the collective story ends my isolation and removal from my own stories. It gives me the strength to own my own stories, my own knowledge. It also gives me

the opportunity to express the stories and knowledge to others so that we can begin the process of informing each other rather than continuing to presuppose that any other authority has the ability to express the knowledge which is contained in my or our stories.

Connecting the Circle - Ending Where I Began

I was considering whether I performed the tasks outlined in the purpose of this thesis. I am also considering the significance of the work. I revisited the initial intentions which I had, and that was to describe, in the form of a collective narrative, and to reflect on the stories of four Metis women as an example of how I interpret and make meaning out of stories in order to gain knowledge. After completing this task, I now understand, in a more indepth way, the ways in which I was prevented from my knowledge, from my stories. The description and reflection on the stories of the four Metis women fulfills my expression of perceiving the purpose of this thesis as valid. As well, I now know that it was important to write this thesis as a Metis woman because I do relate strongly to other First Nations women, but our experiences and life stories as Metis people are often significantly different. For this reason, speaking as a Metis woman has been very important because it identifies the need to understand our deep relationships with other First Nations women because we are part of a story of sameness, a part of a history of sameness regardless of our present day experiences.

I want to make it clear that I am not going to speak about Inuit or Metis women. I have no expertise in either of these two topics. I certainly have no authority to speak on behalf of Metis or Inuit women. They have never asked me to speak for them. They are quite capable of speaking for themselves. (Monture-Angus, 1995, p. 249)

It is also important to understand the purpose of speaking as a woman.

I understand my stories and the stories of other women with many connections.

Even though there are distinctions which separate groups according to racial and cultural backgrounds, the stories of women in general have also been

silenced. If the purpose of my thesis is to describe and then reflect on the stories of four Metis women, then I consider the purpose of my reflection. I

suppose my reflection is really an expression of how I make meaning out of the stories. This meaning informs and forms the basis of my knowledge.

Research into meaning is the most basic of all inquiry. Husserl has pointed out that the whole scientific enterprise is grounded ultimately in the perceptual and meaning-making operations of human consciousness. The understanding of our existence and action requires a knowledge of the structures that produce the experienced or lived realm from which we direct our actions and expressions. The study of the realm of meaning precedes an understanding of the manner in which human beings create knowledge, and thus informs the operations of science itself. The study of the making of meaning is particularly central to the disciplines concerned with explaining human experience. (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 9)

My thesis underscores the need to consider the development and validation of stories as representing forms of knowledge. It is significant to understand story as representing forms of knowledge because stories have been the primary way in which I have learned and the way in which I make

meaning in my life. Without the story, I would not be able to access the knowledge which is presented in my family and my community. Without the story, I would not survive.

My people are a storytelling people and my efforts here are a desire to capture the oral tradition. ...All I have to share with you is myself, my experience and how I have come to understand that experience. ... In my culture, not speaking from the "me" is a violation. The only true knowledge that I can have is that which is learned from what I have experienced. For First Nations, the rule is that all knowledge is what we have learned about the self. ...By sharing my story and my pain, perhaps you too will remember how to dream. It is our dreams that make the future possible. I cannot ever become more than I am able to dream. (Monture-Angus, 1995, pp. 44-45)

The other significance of this thesis is that it provides me with the opportunity to dream, or to move forward to the next path in my life. Having learned from this opportunity, I do have a clearer vision of the world which created confusion for me before I was able to own my own story. The thesis process has grounded me because of the experience involved and also because of the clarification to claim ownership of the stories which inform my knowledge. This grounding process of engaging in the thesis activities has "involved the social and human science experience that is embedded in an individual's interactive encounter with a state of affairs that required seeking meaning, direction, decision, action and reflection" (Schubert, 1991, p. 216).

In the process of living the story which has created this thesis document, I have come around to understanding what I always knew but was never able to articulate. My ability to articulate was not well developed because it was not

offered to me as a learning opportunity and because it was difficult for me to accept the knowledge of others as my own. I knew this knowledge was not my own because it did not reflect what I knew and what I had learned. It just did not feel right. In the presentation of information as knowledge about me as a Metis woman, I just could not say what was not right about the knowledge being presented. With only the authority of my own voice, I can now articulate how difficult it was for me to try to fit in to this knowledge. I internalized this attempt to fit in and I considered myself a failure. Now I recognize that the knowledge presented to me was in many ways incomplete. I now understand that the knowledge we have access to today is merely a slice of knowledge and that there is an entire realm of knowledge which is yet untapped and unrepresented. My ability to understand how knowledge is incomplete is revealed through the reclamation of my own story. Contained within my stories is the knowledge which I own as a Metis woman. I can now understand more clearly how I can participate in the creation of my own stories, my own knowledge.

When I began as a graduate student I did not have faith in the research process. It appeared fraught with difficulties which I could not understand as being valid. Nevertheless, I engaged in the process, and as a result of that experience I can now support some aspects of the graduate studies process and I can offer some suggestions to improve the experience as I understand it. I would not have been able to do this without engaging in the events which were required in order to complete the task. I also know that most of my

learning, most of the knowledge which I will gain from this experience, is not yet known to me. I am grateful for the experience and for the ability to remove myself from the disillusionment of the process of graduate studies which, at times, almost led me to withdrawing. This story will continue to evolve.

The Circle is Complete - A Story, Our Story...

In this chapter I have integrated within the text, the use and support of both First Nations and mainstream educational theory. I have purposefully written in this manner for it describes the way in which I bring together an understanding of my First Nations and European ancestry within the society in which I live today. I have presented the information as a representation of how I see the worlds in which I live in an integrated manner. As a halfbreed, mixed blood, Metis woman, this text represents my story of the writing of the thesis document. In this document I have described the stories of four Metis women in the form of collective narratives. As well, as a Metis woman, I have reflected on the collective narratives as an example of how I interpret and make meaning out of our stories in order to gain knowledge. I am happy to leave you with a final story, so that I may begin on a new journey, and so that I can exemplify the taking of the best from all worlds and the guiding principle of living and moving towards the good in life. One of the very significant ways in which I can do this is to tell you this story.

I want to tell you the story about my children. Nathan is a young man now, and I can hardly believe that he has grown to his size and age. It seems

like yesterday that he was a little boy, and I remember the time he first rode his bike. I remember how he fell down onto the stones and how my heart and hands wanted to rescue him from that experience. I see Nathan as my philosopher, he is always trying to find the meaning behind the world. My daughter, Lysanne, has this wonderful spirit. She is a young woman now, and I can remember the experiences which she gave to me. Lysanne has always been her own person, and even when she was a little girl, she was determined to express that personhood. By the time she was eighteen months old she was deciding upon her own selection of clothing. In fact, she would choose her own clothes to wear and definitely made her own fashion statements. Her spirit has allowed me to learn about my own expectations and to learn about acceptance. Lucien is still my little boy. He is a child full of wonder and joyous laughter. Lucien is our baby in the family but he acts so grown up. I will always remember how he uses words, adult kinds of words, to express himself. And the rest of us in the family are awed by this ability and we snicker because he uses these adult words in the right contexts. And Lucien just loves to cuddle. These children have been given to me in order to create stories with, and the stories which we share are our treasures and our knowledge.

This thesis is also dedicated to another child who was taken from me. I have no name to give to you in order to identify this child. I have no personality to describe to you, and I have no stories to tell you about this child, except, the story of how this child was taken away from me. But my child will never be

gone from my being. The poem at the beginning of the thesis, "I am sorry that I couldn't protect you", is for my child. This child and I have a special bond, a special relationship which only I have been privileged to know. So, my thesis is, in part, dedicated to all of my children. Thank you for the stories and thank you for the knowledge which you have given to me.

You know, stories and learning have many different interpretations and, you know, with me there is something different every time. Almost every person thinks somehow you, as the teacher or mother, have all the meanings, right. It's like they ask you, what is the answer? Come on, let me know what it is, what is the answer? And, I think, holy, well, it's like, you know, this is what it is for me and this is why. And then I go about in my round about way of telling them what it is, like what it means and why it is important to me. I say what it is about, maybe in my childhood, or something in my experience that has led me to this knowledge in this way. And then I say, so like what does it mean to you? And, I learn from that.

We can't always find the right answer. Your kids and your students, you know, they are used to power relations and used to being seriously at the bottom of the pile. They have no power, no power, but what they have is the ability to know, eh. So, as soon as they are in an environment to learn, they do.

You know, it starts out where they classify you as a pushover. Oh, you know, she is so easy. And, it is funny, you know, the better relations you have

with your students and your kids then the more they just work towards growing and learning because they don't want to let you down. Or they don't want to let the relationship down. And other people are saying, like, you can't have relationships like that with your students and your children because they don't learn anything that way, you know. Well, I beg to differ on that. The only meaningful learning that is going on, that is going to take place, is going to come out of the relationship with the student or your kid. And this is to have some respect for what is being said, their story. Students and kids have respect for what you are saying in coming to know you and your passion. So, if you give them nothing of yourself, then you lose the core of everything that we do, which is our spirit, our stories. That sense of wanting to belong, to know something, that sense of seeing ourselves in relations is where we do our work.

So sometimes I don't know what to tell or how much. I don't know about telling the stories. That is, sometimes I get very emotional about something, and we start to tell those stories and I might even say something about myself, you know. Something like this happened to me when I was little or something like that. And I will tell the story. And, then, I talk about that and how I see things or know things from that. Now, from that, an experience may be different for them, but they figure that out. And sometimes I walk away from a place and, you know, I walk away and I think, oh, goodness, I was too personal. I kind of kick myself in the rear end for a couple of days. But this always happens to me. This always happens. Then, the students or your kids

will come back to you either fairly soon or sometimes a long time away, maybe two or three years, or longer. And they say, do you remember what you told us about that, you told us that story. And, you know, it's like in that moment it hits me that it was right to tell that story at that time. But, you know, I don't know how many times I walk away and question myself. And I think that this is part of my learning, my knowing about when to tell that story. I don't know if other people get into that dilemma, but I think that there is pressure to keep your story to yourself. You can't learn things just from books. Well, so, you know, I think then I get this experience again where I watch other people, like my students or my kids, I watch them coming to know something. I go back, and this experience that I talked about gets thrown back at me and I think, no, I told that story in order to build a good relationship. And it is about that story and the relationship because when I give something away, when you give a piece of yourself away, then you learn from that. I guess it's almost like I am walking a tight rope sometimes and I am afraid to fall one way or the other. Oh well, but I guess, in the end, I always seem to go for the telling of the story, and I guess I do risk what needs to be said in order to know something better.

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Appendix A
Agreement and Consent Form

Agreement and Consent Form

Dear Participant:

I am a graduate student in the Department of Educational Foundations, at the University of Saskatchewan. The study I will conduct in partial fulfilment of the requirements for my master's thesis is a reflection upon the themes contained in the stories of Metis women. The purpose of this study is to describe how the themes of Metis women represent a form of knowledge.

My study will be important to Metis women in that we will be given an opportunity to give voice to our experiences which form the basis for our knowledge through stories. Also, this study is important because it will provide culturally accurate and relevant information.

Participation in this study will require two conversation meetings of approximately 1.5 to 2.0 hours per meeting. During this time I would like us to converse in a natural way with the understanding of the importance of my study in mind. A tape recorder will be used during the course of the conversations so that I can transcribe the conversations into written text. The transcriptions will be provided to you after the conversations and you will be asked to complete the Data Release Form and to give your consent to use the material of your choice. All tapes and transcripts will be destroyed after formal acceptance of my master's thesis by the University of Saskatchewan has been granted. Pseudonyms will be used in the study in order to provide anonymity to you as a participant. Our conversations will be held in strict confidence by me. Your participation in my study is entirely voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any time.

I sincerely appreciate your participation in this study.

I agree to participate in this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Print Name: _____

If you require further information, please call me at 966-7688 or 384-7308.

Louise Legare: _____ Date: _____

Appendix B
Data Release Form

Dear Participant:

I would like to present to you a transcription in hard copy form of the two conversations which we had in order to collect data for this study. I appreciate your participation in the conversation process.

Now that you have the transcripts, would you please read the text carefully and:

1. amend the parts you think are inaccurate;
2. add your comments, suggestions, or clarifications where applicable; and
3. cross out any parts which you do not want me to use in this study.

After you have read the transcripts with the above in mind, please sign this release form and return it to me with the hard copy transcription of the conversations.

Louise Legare
Office 3072
College of Education
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon, SK S7N 0W0

Again, I sincerely appreciate your participation in this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Print Name: _____

If you require further information, please call me at 966-7688 or 384-7308.

Louise Legare: _____ Date: _____

